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T-7'S IMPACT ON PILOT TRAINING

CHAPMAN'S LAST STAND

MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENT'S STORY ADAPTED FOR FILM

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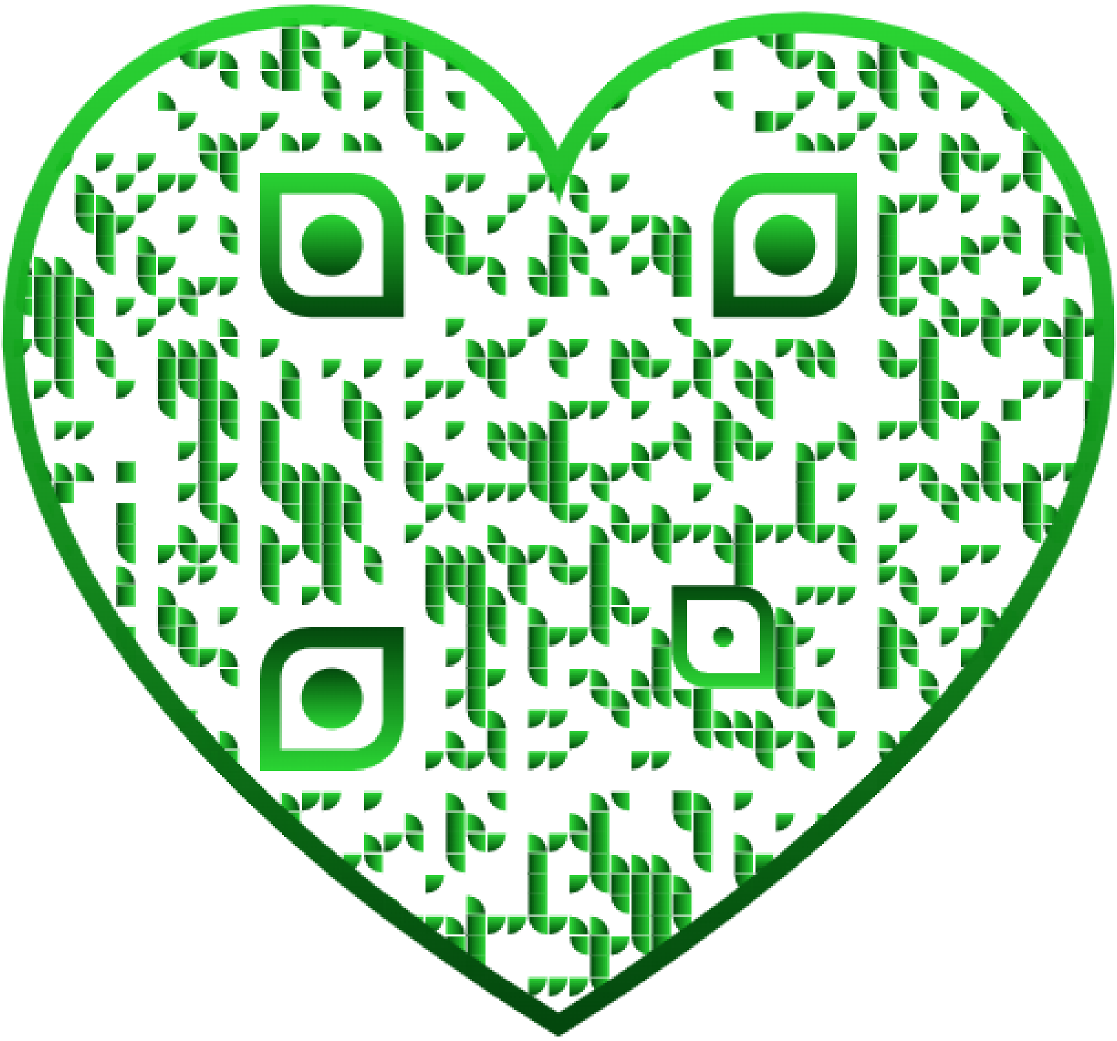

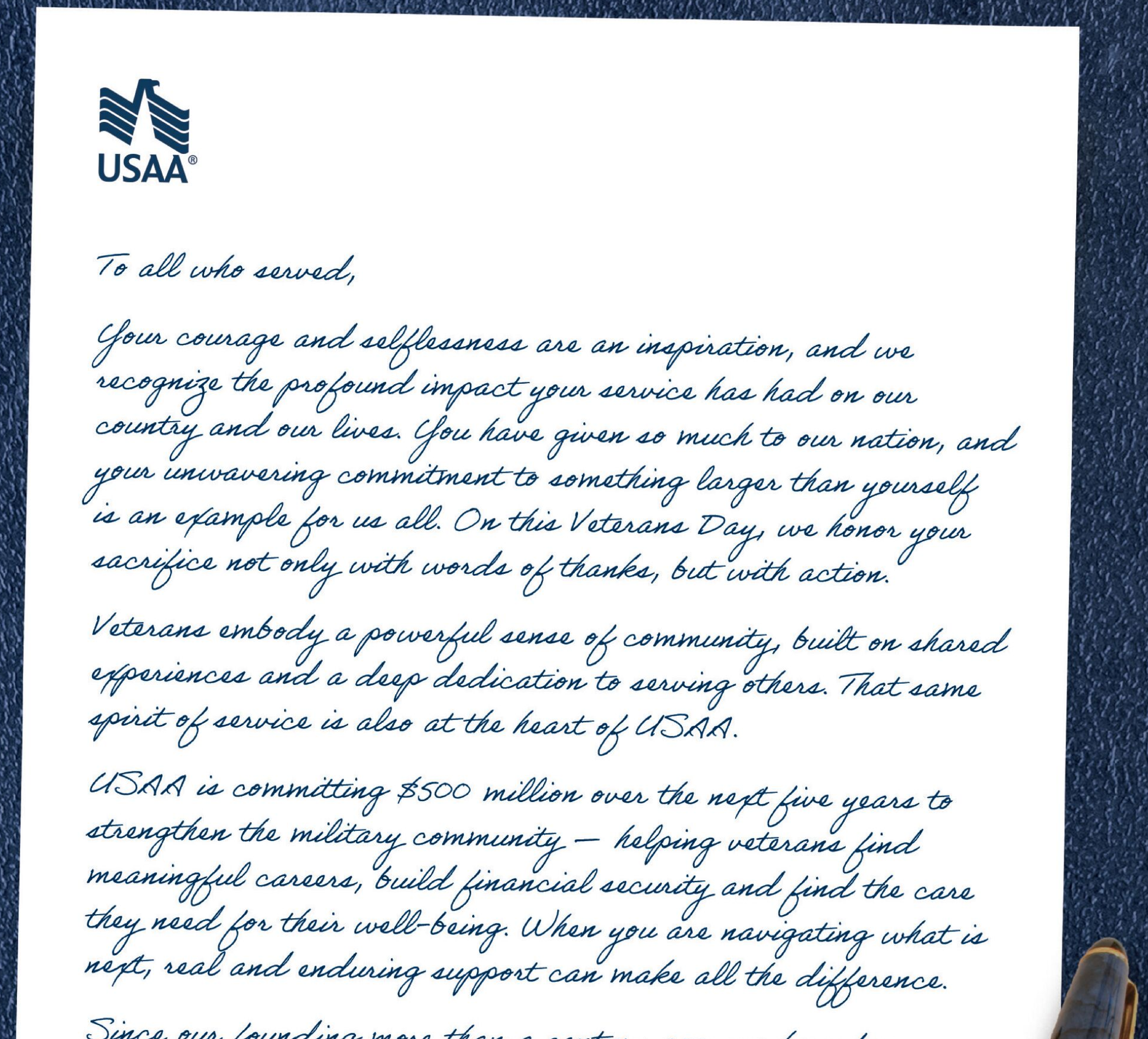

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U.S. AIR FORCE

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ON THE RADAR

BASE LAND TO BE LEASED FOR PRIVATE AI DATA CENTERS

The Department of the Air Force is looking to lease thousands of acres of land at five separate bases to private firms for the purpose of building artificial intelligence data centers.

The department posted a solicitation online asking for proposals to develop land, which it called “underutilized,” at Arnold Air Force Base in Tennessee, Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Arizona, Edwards Air Force Base in California, Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in New Jersey and Robins Air Force Base in Georgia.

“AI is transforming the modern world, and these data centers are crucial for America to remain at the forefront of innovation,” Robert Moriarty, the Air Force’s deputy assistant secretary for installations, said in a statement provided to Defense News.

The Air Force’s move to lease the land comes in response to a series of executive orders issued by President Donald Trump in January and July that seek to speed up the nation’s adoption of AI technology and facilitate the construction of the massive data centers that technology requires.

The July executive order calls for the Defense Department to identify various sites on military installation land that could be used for data center infrastructure. Once identified, that land is to be competitively leased, according to the order.

When asked if the data centers would be used to drive Air Force-specific or military AI projects, or those run by outside organizations, an Air Force official responded, “This is an opportunity for outside organizations.”

The Air Force set a Nov. 14 deadline for companies to submit their proposals for leasing rights, and will make a selection — or selections — next January.

After the land is awarded, the Air Force will conduct environmental assessments to inform design and development refinements, the service confirmed.

The lease proposal request detailed about 3,100 acres across the five bases that could be used to build data centers.

More than 2,100 of those acres are located at Edwards, a massive installation in the California desert often used for testing new aircraft such as the B-21 Raider bomber and the T-7 Red Hawk trainer.

To qualify, a project must require more than 100 megawatts of new load and be worth at least $500 million, among other requirements.

The leases will not run for any period longer than 50 years, unless the company leasing the land wants a longer lease and the government decides it is in the government’s interest or promotes national defense. ■

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Gen David W. Allvin
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ERIC DIETRICH/AIR FORCE

AIR FORCE SCRAPS PLAN FOR NEW CAPABILITIES COMMAND

The Air Force has scrapped its outgoing chief of staff's plan to create an independent command focused on developing the service's future requirements into new systems.

The functions of the provisional Independent Capabilities Command will be folded into a restructured version of Air Force Futures by next April, the department said.

"This restructuring will accelerate the delivery of combat power, improve efficiency and shorten the decision timeline," Air Force Sec. Troy Meink said in a statement.

Last February, former Air Force Sec. Frank Kendall and Chief of Staff Gen. David Allvin announced plans to create the ICC as a key pillar of a vast "reoptimization" of the service to better prepare it for a potential conflict with China.

Allvin wanted the ICC to centralize future requirements planning, instead of having individual commands handle those responsibilities themselves. He further urged lawmakers to fund it so the Air Force could move quickly to set it up.

But lawmakers wanted to hear more about how the reoptimization would work. And as the Trump administration returned, new Pentagon leaders were skeptical of the program and put it on hold. Allvin announced his surprise early retirement in August, amid reports that it was prompted by his strong advocacy for the reoptimization that was falling out of the administration's favor.

Now, the duties of what would have been the ICC will still be done, but not as its own brand new command.

The Air Force said that this change will leverage the work done over the past year and speed up decision making, while cutting personnel and eliminating duplication of effort at echelons of command. It will also cut the number of steps needed to coordinate associated command structures, the department said.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth ordered the Department of the Air Force to review the effort to set up ICC, the department said.

In the process of that review, according to the emailed statement, Meink and Allvin ordered Air Force Futures to be restructured to better align the service's modernization efforts.

As part of the restructuring of Air Force Futures, the service will create a new Chief Modernization Officer position. That official will be in charge of four main areas: Strategy and force design; mission integration and mission threads; capability development and requirements; and modernization investment prioritization.

Until the ICC is fully folded into Air Force Futures, the department said it will keep working to improve modernization and how it is prioritized, supporting key investment areas and preparing to join Futures. ■

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YOUR AIR FORCE

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US AIR FORCE REVAMPS PILOT TRAINING AS T-7 ERA NEARS

BY STEPHEN LOSEY

The Air Force is laying the groundwork to start incorporating the T-7A Red Hawk into its pilot training operations.

But the service is still about two years away from the first student pilots learning in the new, fifth-generation, Boeing-made jet. Before that can happen, the Air Force has to train its own trainers, said Air Education and Training Command deputy commander Maj. Gen. Clark Quinn.

The Air Force is now in the process of buying 351 T-7s to replace its aging T-38 Talon jets. T-38s are roughly six decades old and were designed to teach pilots to fly Vietnam-era third-generation jets, such as F-100 Super Sabres, F-105 Thunderchiefs and F-4 Phantoms, Quinn said in a recent interview at the Air and Space Forces Association's Air Space Cyber conference.

"All of the aircraft that the T-38 was designed to train for retired 30-plus years ago," Quinn said.

T-38s have continued to be used to train pilots to fly fourth-generation jets like the F-15 Eagle and F-16 Fighting Falcon. But when it comes to the F-22 and F-35, the Talon's design doesn't translate, and pilots now must learn to fly on actual fifth-generation jets. The Air Force has a limited number of those jets to use for training, hindering its ability to teach pilots to fly modern fighters.

That is why the Air Force issued Boeing a $9.2 billion contract in 2018 to start building the T-7. It was named the Red Hawk in honor of the Tuskegee Airmen, pioneering Black airmen who flew red-tailed fighters to escort bombers during World War II.

The road has since been rocky, with the program facing delays, supply chain crunches and design flaws that had to be corrected — but it is moving forward. Boeing has now delivered all six test Red Hawks to the Air Force, with the first having arrived in November 2023.

The first non-test T-7 is scheduled to arrive Dec. 5 at Joint Base San Antonio-Randolph in Texas, Quinn said.

But that won't mark the beginning of actually teaching new pilots to fly in the T-7, Quinn cautioned. Before that happens, the Air Force's cadre of instructor pilots need to familiarize themselves with the new, advanced trainer jet, he said, and maintainers need to learn how to keep it in flying shape.

The first T-7 at Randolph won't be flying every day, Quinn said — but it will need to fly to put some wear and tear on the jet for

A T-7A Red Hawk aircraft sits in a partially built state at Boeing's St. Louis production facility.

USAF
AF 21 7002

The T-7 Red Hawk is meant to teach student pilots how to fly fifth-generation aircraft such as the F-35.

COURTESY OF BOEING

the maintainers to practice repairing. At first, Boeing personnel will handle most of the jets' maintenance while teaching Air Force maintainers, who will take on a greater repair role over time.

The second T-7 will arrive at Randolph sometime in spring 2026, Quinn said. The slow growth of the T-7 fleet will then begin to accelerate until it hits 14 jets at Randolph and reaches initial operational capability in August 2027, he said.

At that point, Quinn said, more instructor pilots will know how to teach new pilots in the T-7.

In early 2028, jets will start to arrive at the 14th Flying Training Wing at Columbus Air Force Base in Mississippi. That will be the first location where new students will learn how to fly in the T-7. By that point, he said, the Air Force will be buying two or three jets each month from Boeing, most of which will go straight from the company's St. Louis, Missouri, factory to Columbus.

When the T-7 is up to full-rate production, Quinn said, the Air Force plans to bring on between 48 and 60 new jets per year. This would allow the service to change out at least a full training squadron each year, he said.

"When we're buying that many a year, you can change a wing in essentially a year and a half," Quinn said. "Once we hit '28 and '29, we start getting aircraft quickly, and the bases start recapitalizing from T-38s to T-7s pretty quickly."

ALL NEW JET TRAINER, ALL NEW LESSON PLAN

While the T-7 is, effectively, a replacement for the T-38, Quinn said the Air Force wants it to lead to more — a revamping of how the service trains new pilots.

"If all we do is think of it as a new T-38, we're really going to miss a lot of opportunities," Quinn said.

AETC is poring over its pilot training plans to figure out what tactics and skills it still teaches that are now out of date and could be scratched, Quinn said.

For example, when the T-38 syllabus was first drawn up, the Air Force commonly sent large numbers of fighters into battle together, Quinn said. This meant student pilots had to routinely practice formation takeoffs and landings.

But operational commanders don't use those tactics anymore, Quinn said, so AETC has dropped formation takeoffs and landings from its syllabus. And as older planes like the F-15C and A-10 Warthog retire and new jets come on, Air Force pilot training courses will change even more.

Sometimes, said 19th Air Force commander Maj. Gen. Gregory Kreuder, student pilots can pick up bad habits from learning to fly in outdated jets that they later have to unlearn.

Quinn said that during his time as a T-38 instructor pilot, he spent about a quarter of the syllabus just teaching students how to land the jet without crashing.

The T-38 is extremely fast and has unique flight characteristics during the landing process. For example, it has no leading edge flaps on its wings, Kreuder said, which can make the T-38 prone to stalling.

If that happens, "you've got to know what to do quickly, or you can be in big trouble," Kreuder said. "Too much of the time that we're spending is towards [teaching flying methods for] aircraft that no longer exist."

T-7 *page 12*

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The T-7 is meant to give Air Force's F-35 pilots a trainer jet that realistically mimics flying a fifth-generation airplane.

MARK HERLIHY/AIR FORCE

T-7 *page 9*

The T-7, with its modern avionics and systems, flies much better than the T-38, Quinn said. This will allow instructors to spend more time teaching future pilots the skills they'll need when flying advanced fighters and bombers, including — when the time comes — the sixth-generation F-47 and B-21 Raider bomber.

"Over time, I have seen our aircraft get easier to fly and harder to employ," Kreuder said. "The F-35 is the easiest aircraft to fly that I have ever flown. We want pilots focused on employing the mission weapon systems, and not focused on whether or not they're going to stall and fall out of the sky."

The T-7 also has multiple displays mounted in its cockpits, similar to the F-35's, Kreuder said, which will help student pilots learn to employ weapons in a training environment closer to a real-world scenario.

"The cockpits are very representative of the fleet we have," Kreuder said. The T-7 is "a very gentle aircraft. I got to fly it. It flies a lot like an F-16 and an F-35. It's very powerful, very smooth, a very gentle handling. It's right what we need."

That will also make it easier for student pilots to spend time in on-the-ground training simulators, learning the finer points of employing sensors, weapons and other systems, he said.

As the Air Force revamps its training programs to suit the T-7, the service is looking to see if there are overlooked vital skills to teach that can take the place of dropped lessons — or even if it can shorten the course and graduate pilots even quicker.

And even though the advanced T-47 fighter is still in its early stages and little is known about how it will fly, the Air Force's trainers are already starting to think ahead to the sixth-generation era.

As jets advance, Kreuder said, their software becomes increasingly important, and the T-7 will need to adapt to keep up with the T-47.

"We need something that we can upgrade, that is not hardwired," Kreuder said. "Software is the future. As long as we can [upgrade], we can keep somewhat up with the basics."

AETC is also looking towards a future where fighter pilots fly into battle alongside semi-autonomous drone wingmen, known as collaborative combat aircraft, which would attack enemies, conduct jamming operations or recon or serve as decoys to lure enemy fire.

The Air Force could decide that pilots should learn to employ CCAs once they arrive at their operational unit, Quinn said. Or, Kreuder said, AETC may start folding CCA simulations into the T-7's ground training programs.

But much of how CCA training will work is still to be decided.

"We're going to have to adapt to [CCAs], clearly," Kreuder said. "Some of it we can do with computers in the … simulator environment. Do I need to actually see the thing that I'm interacting with in order to train to it? We're at the very beginning of the conversation." ■

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Marine veteran and actor Adam Driver is set to play Medal of Honor recipient John Chapman.

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ADAM DRIVER SET TO STAR AS MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENT JOHN CHAPMAN

BY J.D. SIMKINS AND HOPE HODGE SECK

Marine veteran and star actor Adam Driver has officially been cast as Air Force combat controller and Medal of Honor recipient John Chapman in an upcoming feature film.

Chapman, who was killed in action in Afghanistan during March 2002's harrowing Battle at Takur Ghar, was first recognized with the Air Force Cross prior to the award's 2018 upgrade to the Medal of Honor.

In 2021 it was announced that actor Jake Gyllenhaal would play Chapman in the prospective film "Combat Control." Subsequent script issues and studio changes, however, left the project in flux for years.

Now, the film is slated to be helmed by director Ron Howard, who will move ahead with the project under the title, "Alone at Dawn," according to Deadline.

The film is based on the best-selling book of the same name by Dan Schilling and Lori Chapman Longfritz, Chapman's sister.

A FIGHT TO THE END

The upgrade of Chapman's Air Force Cross to the Medal of Honor followed an exhaustive investigation into the heroic firefight that claimed his life.

In the early morning hours of March 4, 2002, Chapman was on board a U.S. Army MH-47E helicopter with a team of Navy SEALs when the crew, which was attempting to insert atop the peak of the 10,000-foot Tukar Ghar, came under heavy fire from al-Qaida fighters below.

Hit with rocket propelled grenade and small arms fire, the badly damaged helicopter attempted to lift off. As it lurched, one of the SEALs, Petty Officer First Class Neil Roberts, fell from the back of the helicopter onto the snow-covered ground below.

Roberts activated his infrared strobe as the stricken helicopter flew, eventually making an emergency landing miles away.

Once on the ground, another Chinook helicopter picked up Chapman and the SEAL team to return to the peak and attempt to rescue Roberts. This time, the team successfully disembarked.

Once on the ground, Chapman was "the first to charge up the mountain toward the enemy," President Donald Trump said at the 2018 Medal of Honor presentation.

Under fire from three directions, Chapman advanced through the snow and killed two enemy combatants who had

CHAPMAN *page 16*

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CHAPMAN *page 14*

been firing from a fortified position.

An enemy machine gunner then unleashed a hailstorm on the team from just 40 feet away. Chapman launched into a sprint toward the fighter but was hit by multiple enemy rounds, knocking him unconscious.

What followed has been the source of great infighting and dispute.

The SEAL team, believing Chapman to be dead, evacuated down the mountain to a position of safety.

Among the SEALs was Medal of Honor recipient Master Chief Special Warfare Operator Britt Slabinski, who maneuvered the team away from the onslaught while "carrying a seriously wounded teammate through deep snow [and] calling in fire on the enemy," according to his medal citation.

Footage retrieved from a Predator drone and later analyzed, however, showed that Chapman was not dead.

In fact, he became active again after regaining consciousness, mounting a one-man offensive against the enemy, despite his wounds, and continuing to "fight relentlessly" until all his ammunition was expended and he could fight no more, according to his medal citation.

MQ-1 Predator drone footage showed Chapman's final moments, during which he killed at least one insurgent in hand-to-hand combat, as the enemy swarmed his position and began firing on another helicopter that was arriving with a quick-reaction force.

After being wounded 16 times, Chapman was killed by a close-proximity gunshot to the heart. He was 36.

For years, the exact circumstances surrounding Chapman's death remained a mystery. A 2016 report from The New York Times revealed that former Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James, after seeing the drone footage of the engagement, was the first to recommend that Chapman's Air Force Cross be upgraded to the Medal of Honor.

After cross-referencing the video feed from the drone and testimony by troops on the ground and in the air — an AC-130 air crew was also overhead — a 17-person investigative team was able to pinpoint actions taken by Chapman on that frigid mountainside where he took his last breath.

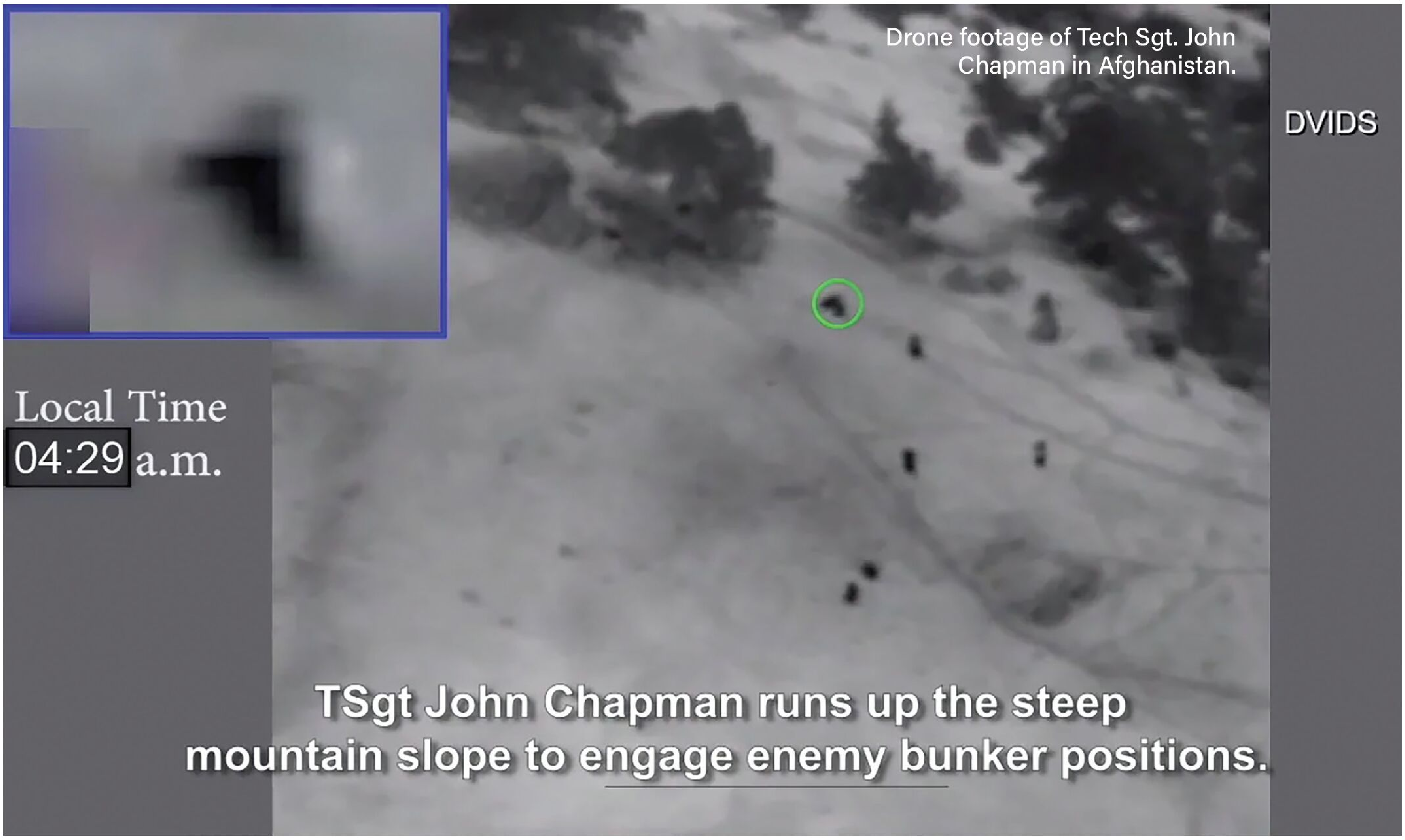
"John survived that initial wounding that he got, and continued to fight on for an hour," Chapman's squadron commander Col. Ken Rodriguez said.

"And then at a crucial moment, right at the end of his life, he sacrificed his life for the incoming quick reaction force, when he could have hunkered down and said, 'Finally, the guys are coming in to get me,'" Rodriguez continued. "But instead he said, 'If I don't do something, others are going to die.' He's clearly a Medal of Honor-worthy warrior."

When former President Trump presented the Medal of Honor to Chapman's widow, Valerie Nessel, the Windsor Locks, Connecticut, native became the first airman to receive the nation's highest award for valor since the Vietnam War.

Now, the portrayal of Chapman's heroics will fall to the 41-year-old Marine veteran. Anne Hathaway has also been confirmed as a cast member alongside Driver.

A theatrical release date has yet to be announced. ■



TSgt John Chapman runs up the steep mountain slope to engage enemy bunker positions.

Drone footage of Tech Sgt. John Chapman in Afghanistan.

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BEST FOR VETS
2025
MILITARY TIMES
COLLEGES

HIGHER EDUCATION FINDS NEW PURPOSE IN VETERAN SUCCESS

The Clemson University Reserve Officer's Training Corps honor guard on the Clemson campus.

KEN SCAR

BY MILITARY TIMES STAFF

Across the country, colleges are transforming what it means to serve veterans. The 2025 Military Times Best for Vets: Colleges rankings highlight a growing shift in higher education — one where institutions are rethinking how to recruit, retain and empower veterans and military-connected students.

This year's full list, which features 357 schools, is underscore by innovation. Universities are moving from symbolic gestures to comprehensive systems of support designed to help veterans thrive both in and beyond the classroom.

Veteran students today bring a depth of experience that challenges traditional campus models. Many are older, balancing family and full-time work. They expect clear outcomes, flexible schedules and a sense of belonging.

The most successful colleges are responding not with one-size-fits-all programs, but with holistic ecosystems that connect academic, emotional and career resources under one roof.

At Bowling Green State University in Ohio, where the school rose from #20 in the 2024 rankings to #7 in 2025, the major contributor to success is peer connection.

Bowling Green State has built a model centered around military-affiliated peer advisors who help new students navigate campus life and connect to resources early.

Assistant Vice President Barbara Henry described this approach as one grounded in community.

"We believe one of our strengths is our military-affiliated student peer-advisors who are doing an outstanding job of building connections with new military students," Henry said. "They are building personal connections that welcome the new students into our military center. This connection builds community with the peer advisors, continuing military students, military tutors, and our supporting staff."

That sense of community has yielded tangible results. The school's military center is open from 7:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., and its increased use reflects the center's growing role as a hub for support and connection.

Henry noted that more military students are using tutoring services, and the results are measurable — from improved test scores to higher retention and graduation rates. BGSU's structured communication between its military office and academic departments ensures that when students face challenges — from enrollment changes to benefit questions — they're not facing them alone.

It's a model of proactive engagement that goes beyond compliance to foster success at every stage of the academic journey.

At the University of New Mexico, which climbed from #18 in 2024 to #10 this year, the focus is on structured mentorship.

The school's Veteran & Military Resource Center operates under a simple but purposeful idea: peer guidance is often the bridge between transition and success.

COLLEGES *page 22*

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COLLEGES *page 18*

TOP 100 COLLEGES

Top colleges and universities for veterans in the 2025 Military Times Best for Vets survey

#	ORGANIZATION
1	University of the Incarnate Word
2	Angelo State University
3	Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University - Daytona Beach
4	Quinnipiac University
5	Appalachian State University
6	Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University - Prescott
7	Bowling Green State University
8	University of Nebraska at Omaha
9	Santa Fe College
10	The University of New Mexico
11	Grand Valley State University
12	University of Washington Tacoma
13	Clemson University
14	Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
15	University of West Florida
16	Northern Arizona University
17	University of Rhode Island
18	Texas Tech University
19	University of North Texas
20	University of Arizona
21	Georgetown University
22	Penn State World Campus
23	University of Tennessee, Knoxville
24	California State University, San Bernardino
25	The University of Southern Mississippi
26	Eastern Michigan University
27	California State University, San Marcos
28	University of Nevada, Las Vegas
29	Montana State University Billings
30	University of Kansas
31	Utah Tech University
32	Texas State University
33	Fayetteville State University
34	Colorado State University
35	Western Illinois University
36	Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University - Worldwide
37	SUNY College of Agriculture and Technology at Cobleskill
38	National Louis University
39	University of St. Thomas, Minnesota
40	University of Central Missouri
41	Pasadena City College
42	University of Maine
43	University of Maryland Global Campus
44	The University of Texas at San Antonio
45	Mercer University
46	University of Missouri
47	Southwest Virginia Community College
48	The University of Toledo
49	Western Kentucky University
50	North Carolina State University
51	University of Central Florida
52	East Carolina University
53	Saint Leo University
54	Georgia State University
55	Eastern Kentucky University
56	Montana State University - Bozeman
57	West Virginia University
58	Central Community College
59	Pikes Peak State College
60	Gulf Coast State College
61	Central Michigan University
62	Southern Illinois University Carbondale
63	Millersville University
64	South Dakota School of Mines & Technology
65	Duquesne University
66	Ringling College of Art and Design
67	KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
68	The Catholic University of America
69	Oregon State University
70	Collin College
71	ECPI University LLC
72	Park University
73	Murray State University
74	University of Kentucky
75	University of Alabama in Huntsville
76	Western Michigan University
77	University of North Carolina - Wilmington
78	University of North Carolina - Charlotte
79	Bellevue University
80	Southern Illinois University Edwardsville
81	Oklahoma State University Institute of Technology
82	Fordham University
83	Concord University
84	University of Nebraska - Lincoln
85	Miami Dade College
86	University of South Alabama
87	Florida Atlantic University
88	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
89	University of Cincinnati Online
90	University of South Carolina
91	Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center
92	Old Dominion University
93	University of South Carolina Aiken
94	Mississippi State University
95	University of California, Riverside
96	Oklahoma State University
97	University of Oregon
98	Saginaw Valley State University
99	Columbus State University
100	Metropolitan State University of Denver

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A main entrance to the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque.

SAM WASSON/GETTY IMAGES

COLLEGES *page 18*

"At The University of New Mexico, we are members of the Peer Advising for Veteran Education program, run out of the University of Michigan, to provide a peer mentoring program for our military-affiliated students," said Dr. Alonzo Maestas, the center's director.

Maestas added that UNM also runs a dedicated orientation program for new and transfer students to help them assimilate into campus culture and understand available resources from day one.

By linking incoming veterans with peers who've already navigated academic life, UNM has built a culture of continuity and confidence anchored by encouraging transformation.

Clemson University in South Carolina tells another story of growth grounded in tradition but defined by modern strategy. The university rose from #51 in 2024 to #13 this year, driven by renewed investment in academic and career preparation.

Clemson's strong military heritage is visible across campus, from its ROTC programs to its annual appreciation events, but its current success comes from targeted partnerships that remove barriers for military-connected students.

Partnerships with their Academic Success Center and the Michelin Center for Career and Professional Development help veterans gain academic and professional advantages early in their college experience.

Off campus, the school partners with Upstate Warrior Solution, a nonprofit that supports veterans and their families through advocacy and resource coordination.

"Clemson has a unique culture that is attractive to military-connected students. Its strong military heritage that is celebrated throughout the year," said Jimmy Mullinax, executive director of Military Affairs.

The university has also established three strategic priorities — overall wellness, academic help and career preparation — and is expanding tutoring, textbook assistance and tailored transition programs through national partners like PreVeteran.

Director for Military and Veteran Engagement Emily DaBruzzi said these focus areas have helped create programs that "lead to student success" by aligning wellness and academic goals with career development.

Together, these universities illustrate how veteran education in 2025 has become a laboratory for innovation.

Peer mentorship, structured guidance and collaborative partnerships are replacing bureaucratic silos.

The focus has shifted from enrollment metrics to outcomes — graduation, employment and a sustained sense of belonging.

Mental health and wellness are increasingly central to this transformation. Many schools on this year's list report expanded counseling, veteran-specific peer support and spaces designed for reflection and decompression. Faculty and staff are receiving training in trauma-informed teaching, while schools invest in emergency grants, childcare stipends and mental health services to address the full spectrum of student needs.

These programs recognize that academic success often depends on emotional stability and that the journey from service to scholarship can't be separated from the personal challenges of transition.

The broader story in this year's rankings reflects momentum. Higher education is learning from the veteran community's example of discipline, teamwork and purpose.

As colleges adopt new systems to better serve students, the benefits are spreading to the wider student body — from improved advising models to expanded career partnerships.

Veterans have become catalysts for institutional reform, shaping campuses that are more adaptive, inclusive and future-focused.

The schools leading this year's Best for Vets rankings show that service doesn't end at graduation — it evolves. Through peer connection, mentorship and opportunity, colleges are not only helping veterans earn degrees — they're helping them redefine leadership for the next chapter. ■

To explore this year's full ranking of top schools for veterans, visit
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HOW COMPANIES ARE REDEFINING VETERAN EMPLOYMENT

BY MILITARY TIMES STAFF

For much of the past decade, veteran hiring was often treated as a patriotic checkbox — well-intentioned, but rarely strategic.

Across industries in 2025, employers are embedding military experience into the fabric of their organizations, focusing less on hiring headlines and more on long-term career pathways.

This year's Military Times Best for Vets: Employers rankings — featuring 245 organizations — reflect a movement that now measures impact, not intention. The shift is visible in the data. Companies are building mentorship networks, investing in continuing education and tracking promotion rates for veterans as key performance indicators.

They're also recognizing that veteran inclusion does not just mean filling positions, but translating service experience into leadership and innovation.

Southern Company's climb to the top of the 2025 list underscores this transformation. The Atlanta-based energy provider moved from #11 in 2024 to #1 this year, thanks to a structured investment in military-connected recruiting and retention.

"Our dedicated Military Recruiting Team remains deeply committed to supporting veterans and their families through various channels — including targeted one-on-one sourcing, private sector transition partnerships, strong collaboration across our Employee Resource Groups and participation in workforce development programs across the industry," said Tawanna Middleton, the company's senior recruiting consultant for military programs.

Middleton added that the company's expanded partnership with the U.S. Army Reserve Private Public Partnership Program is helping connect soldiers, veterans and their families to opportunities both within the company and across the energy sector.

It's an approach that positions veteran hiring as a pipeline for leadership and technical expertise.

This holistic mindset is echoed across the 2025 rankings. Defense contractor Amentum, a newcomer to the list, treats military hiring as an ecosystem. Its SkillBridge program — designed to align military skillsets with civilian career tracks — has achieved a 90% hire rate.

Global Military Programs Manager Brian Heffernan described the company's approach as a 360-degree model built around mentorship, policy alignment and a sustainable veteran network. Rather than relying solely on external recruitment, Amentum integrates veteran initiatives with educational and corporate partnerships.

Other companies, meanwhile, are refining large-scale systems that embed veteran support across the employment lifecycle.

"We believe that if we help veterans succeed, they will help us succeed," said Ian McDuffie, Amazon's senior manager for global military affairs.

Amazon jumped from #73 in 2024 to #15 this year. McDuffie pointed to the company's Military SkillBridge fellowships and apprenticeships, programs that provide nearly 2,500 veterans, transitioning service members and military spouses with critical civilian work experience, as examples of the company's commitment.

Amazon's Military Ambassador Program extends that support through a structured year-long transition process, and their Military Mentorship Platform connects new hires with experienced mentors.

Cox Enterprises, new to the rankings this year, runs a SALUTE employee resource group for service members, veterans and supporters across the organization, pairing mentorship with professional development.

The company's commitment to personal growth — through leadership programs and open-access learning — focuses on veteran inclusion as a workforce strategy.

As Senior Recruiter and Military Relations Manager Peter Mahmood explained, Cox's values mirror those of military service, creating a natural alignment between culture and mission.

Employers no longer view veteran hiring as philanthropy, but as workforce enhancement. Employee resource groups have evolved into formal networks that influence leadership training, and many firms now include veteran representation in diversity and inclusion strategies.

Another evolution is the recognition that support must extend to families. Companies across the rankings have expanded spouse employment programs, flexible work options and Guard and Reserve accommodations. Remote work and hybrid schedules are helping veterans and families maintain stability while continuing to serve.

Taken together, trends suggest a sophisticated era of veteran employment in which long-term investments define success.

Southern Company's leadership example, Amentum's integrated partnerships, Amazon's mentorship infrastructure and Cox's cultural alignment each demonstrate how this evolution plays out in practice.

The strongest employers are recognizing that veteran support is not a stand-alone initiative, but rather a lens through which a company can build resilience.

As industries continue to adapt to automation, energy transition and global competition, veterans' value remains vital.

The companies leading the 2025 Best for Vets rankings have recognized that. ■

To explore this year's full ranking of top employers for veterans, visit **bestforvets.militarytimes.com.**

EMPLOYERS *page 26*

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-Kloe Walker, Texas
Daughter of Fallen U.S. Army Captain Shawn Walker

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EMPLOYERS *page 24*

TOP 100 EMPLOYERS

Rankings were drawn from a survey identifying the effort companies and organizations make to recruit, retain and support current and former service members, military spouses and others in the military community.

#	ORGANIZATION
1	Southern Company
2	Enbridge
3	The Warrior Alliance
4	Amentum
5	Cox Enterprises
6	USAA
7	Performance Contractors, Inc.
8	F45 Training
9	Fiserv, Inc.
10	Comcast NBCUniversal
11	Bank of America
12	GE Aerospace
13	Zurich North America
14	J.B. Hunt Transport
15	Amazon
16	Parsons Corporation
17	Boaters Exchange
18	Johnson & Johnson
19	Gulfstream Aerospace Corporation
20	Texas Department of Family and Protective Services
21	Academy Securities
22	Eaton Corp PLC
23	Sanford Health
24	Windstream Holdings
25	Precise Systems, Inc.
26	Bob Woodruff Foundation
27	United Rentals, Inc.
28	Salesforce
29	Ernst & Young LLP (EY US)
30	Hormel Foods Corporation
31	CON EDISON Inc.
32	Woodlawn Fire Department
33	U.S. Department of the Interior
34	Bristol Myers Squibb
35	Capital One Financial Corporation
36	Merck & Co., Inc.
37	Eversource Energy
38	CommonSpirit Health
39	Sonepar USA
40	Premise Health
41	Werner Enterprises, Inc.
42	General Dynamics Information Technology (GDIT)
43	Leidos
44	W. W. Grainger, Inc.
45	AMERICAN SYSTEMS
46	Ferguson
47	The Home Depot
48	The Manitowoc Company, Inc.
49	Deloitte.
50	Centene Corporation
51	Travelers
52	QTS Data Centers
53	UT MD Anderson Cancer Center
54	Melton Truck Lines
55	Navy Federal Credit Union
56	NextOp
57	HCA Healthcare
58	11th Hour Service
59	AAR CORP.
60	The Cigna Group
61	Accenture
62	The Walt Disney Company
63	Safran Defense & Space, Inc.
64	Exelon
65	Liberty Mutual Insurance
66	Serco Inc.
67	Staffmark Group
68	Builders FirstSource
69	BNSF Railway
70	BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina
71	General Dynamics Mission Systems
72	FDM Group
73	Dominion Energy
74	United States Steel Corporation
75	United States Postal Service
76	Clearway Energy
77	Talents ASCEND, Inc.
78	EquipmentShare.com Inc
79	American States Utility Services, Inc. (ASUS)
80	Altec Industries
81	Federal Express Corporation
82	CACI International Inc
83	Sunrun
84	US Foods
85	The RMR Group LLC
86	BAE SYSTEMS
87	AVIAN
88	Booz Allen Hamilton
89	Leonardo DRS, Inc.
90	Point B
91	Eastman
92	Clemson University
93	First Command Financial Services, Inc.
94	USIC
95	Concurrent Technologies Corporation
96	Oshkosh Corporation
97	KSA Integration
98	Flagstar Bank
99	Zscaler
100	Phillips 66

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DESPITE TALIBAN AMNESTY DECLARATION, KILLINGS OF US ALLIES PERSIST

BY HOPE HODGE SECK

Ali Gul Haidari was a platoon sergeant in one of the Afghan Army's most elite commando units partnering with U.S. Army Special Forces troops for missions to retake district centers from the Taliban in north and eastern Afghanistan.

Haidari and his Afghan teammates blended in with their U.S. counterparts "down to the ballcaps and Oakleys," a still-serving Special Forces officer said.

When the U.S. military pulled out of Afghanistan in 2021, Haidari was left behind, despite the target on his back as a known supporter of American troops. He was captured and tortured by the Taliban for 40 days within months after the U.S. pullout.

Following release, he fled with his wife and young daughter to a neighboring country, but was ultimately arrested and deported back to Afghanistan.

Last year, members of the Taliban surrounded the house he was in. When he emerged to speak with them, they gunned him down before he could say anything, while his wife and children looked on.

Haidari's case is just one of dozens of killings of Afghan forces documented in a recent investigation demonstrating that the dangers faced by the U.S.' former allies in Afghanistan continue to persist today.

Military Times, reporting in partnership with the investigative journalism organization Lighthouse Reports, has identified 110 killings of former Afghan National Defense and Security Forces since 2023, the last year that the United Nations published a standalone report on Taliban killings of Afghan forces.

The new data, compiled with support from the Afghan news outlets Hasht-e Subh (8am Media) and Etillaat Roz, includes members of the Afghan special operations community, who worked closely with U.S. Special Forces troops.

These numbers are almost certainly an undercount as a climate of fear exacerbates the challenge of verifying such cases.

The new data also comes on the heels of a move this summer by the U.S. government to end temporary protected status for more than 9,000 Afghans in the U.S., leaving them vulnerable to deportation.

About the same time, a top Taliban official offered an amnesty for Afghans returning from overseas — their latest amnesty pledge.

This new data illustrates that promises of amnesty do not amount to credible security assurances for Afghan allies of the U.S., despite efforts by the administration to claim "an improved security situation."

Moreover, President Donald Trump's January suspension of the Refugee Admissions Program has closed a critical path to safety for those personnel who assisted U.S. operations and

Taliban fighters south of Kabul, Afghanistan, Aug. 15, 2023.

ABDUL KHALIQ/AP

might have sought admission under the P1 and P2 designations, the notations for those requiring special protection or with especially compelling humanitarian needs.

"As we continue to assess the fallout from Afghanistan, it is clear that our responsibilities did not end when U.S. forces withdrew. Accountability is not optional," Rep. Mike Lawler, R-N.Y., said in a statement to Military Times.

Lawler highlighted his introduction of the bipartisan Enduring Welcome Act, which would maintain a database of Afghan allies and reinstitute a U.S. State Department office focused on Afghan relocation.

"The targeting of our Afghan allies makes clear that our work remains unfinished," he said. "For the sake of the men and women who stood with us, and for America's moral standing in the world, we must do more, and we must do it now."

While danger persists, it's getting harder to document.

Sanjar Sohail, founder and publisher of Hasht-e Subh (8am Media), told Mili-

Haidari.

COURTESY OF HAIDARI'S WIFE

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The appearance of U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) visual information does not imply or constitute DoD endorsement.

tary Times he has a network of about 35 journalists still in Afghanistan working to document Taliban revenge acts even as the ability for international organizations to do this accountability work has waned.

What he's seen in the cases of former Afghan military and special forces troops returning to Afghanistan, he said, illustrates the extreme danger to those now facing the possibility of deportation.

"They go back to Afghanistan, either they disappear right after entering Afghanistan, or after a few days they disappear. And then after a few days, their bodies are discovered somewhere, outside the cities or villages," he said.

"So, this is something systematic. This is happening for the past four years, and it will be very dangerous for these people if they get back to Afghanistan."

Sohail said he believed continuous failure to document Taliban violence was making the organization more bold and dangerous.

"Our lack of accountability is actually paving the way for the Taliban to commit more crimes inside Afghanistan," he said.

Loved ones of those targeted by the Taliban are typically left feeling helpless and without recourse.

In an emotional letter provided to the reporting partnership, Haidari's widow described the devastating physical effects of his torture at the hands of the Taliban.

"His entire body was black and swollen; he couldn't even sleep on his back," she wrote. "He would wake up screaming at night."

She mourned the memories her oldest daughter, Hana, would never be able to make with her father, and that her younger daughter, Elena, "had been deprived of him forever."

"She asks me why the Taliban shot her father, and to this day I don't have an answer to this question and countless other questions she has."

The reporting team did not speak with any relatives who are still living inside Afghanistan out of concern for their safety.

Other cases documented by the new investigation, meanwhile, include a former Afghan special operation forces member who lived in such intense fear of reprisal that he refused to marry.

Haidari and his child.

COURTESY OF THE HAIDARI'S WIFE

In 2024, his body was found riddled with bullet holes.

Former Afghan soldiers described being tortured by Taliban forces in the organization's efforts to gain information that would allow them to track down their former colleagues, belying the Taliban's claims that any reprisal killings have been isolated cases of personal revenge.

Another Afghan soldier who worked with American troops and survived after being tortured by the Taliban described being hung upside down for extended periods and subjected to electric shocks.

The torture was orchestrated by his captors as an effort, one that was ultimately successful, to force the former soldier to unlock his phone as they sought information on former colleagues.

The soldier described being repeatedly asked about one particular individual, who he later found out had been arrested and killed.

The reporting team was able to independently confirm this death.

"The most terrifying torture was their plastic bag tactic, when they would put a plastic bag on my head and block my mouth and nose with that, they wouldn't unblock it until I would lose my consciousness," the soldier, a former member of the Ktah Khas elite Afghan special operations unit, who requested anonymity due to persistent danger despite no longer living in Afghanistan, recalled.

Another former Afghan Ktah Khas unit member, who was named in a letter signed by a U.S. Army captain as contributing to "outcomes of sizable strategic significance across Afghanistan," also describes being tortured with the specific intent of getting him to reveal information relative to the identities of other former soldiers.

Mike Edwards, a retired Army master sergeant who spent 18 years in the 75th Ranger Regiment and who helped build the unit in which this Afghan soldier served, said the U.S. can't afford to ignore cases like this.

While critics of the Afghan Adjustment Act, which called to expand SIV eligibility for Afghans who worked and served alongside U.S. forces, among other things, have cited inadequate vetting of some Afghans, these elite units "had the equivalent of a top security clearance," Edwards said.

Failure to protect our allies, he said, jeopardizes America's ability to secure skilled partners in the future.

"When we left, we just left them hanging," Edwards said. "And they're being killed by their enemy, and America just needs to know that."

The active-duty Special Forces officer, who personally served with Haidari and requested anonymity due to his currently ongoing military service, said he felt a strong moral obligation to try and help former allies in the wake of the rapid 2021 fall of Kabul at the hands of the Taliban.

The new investigation, he said, underscores that the danger persists.

"It's just a fact of their existence right now if they had any kind of prominent role fighting the Taliban, and they were literally the last Afghan elements still hunting and fighting Taliban," the service member said.

"They're going to be targeted for retribution. ... Cases like Ali Gul's are just a further reminder that there's a real risk out there." ■

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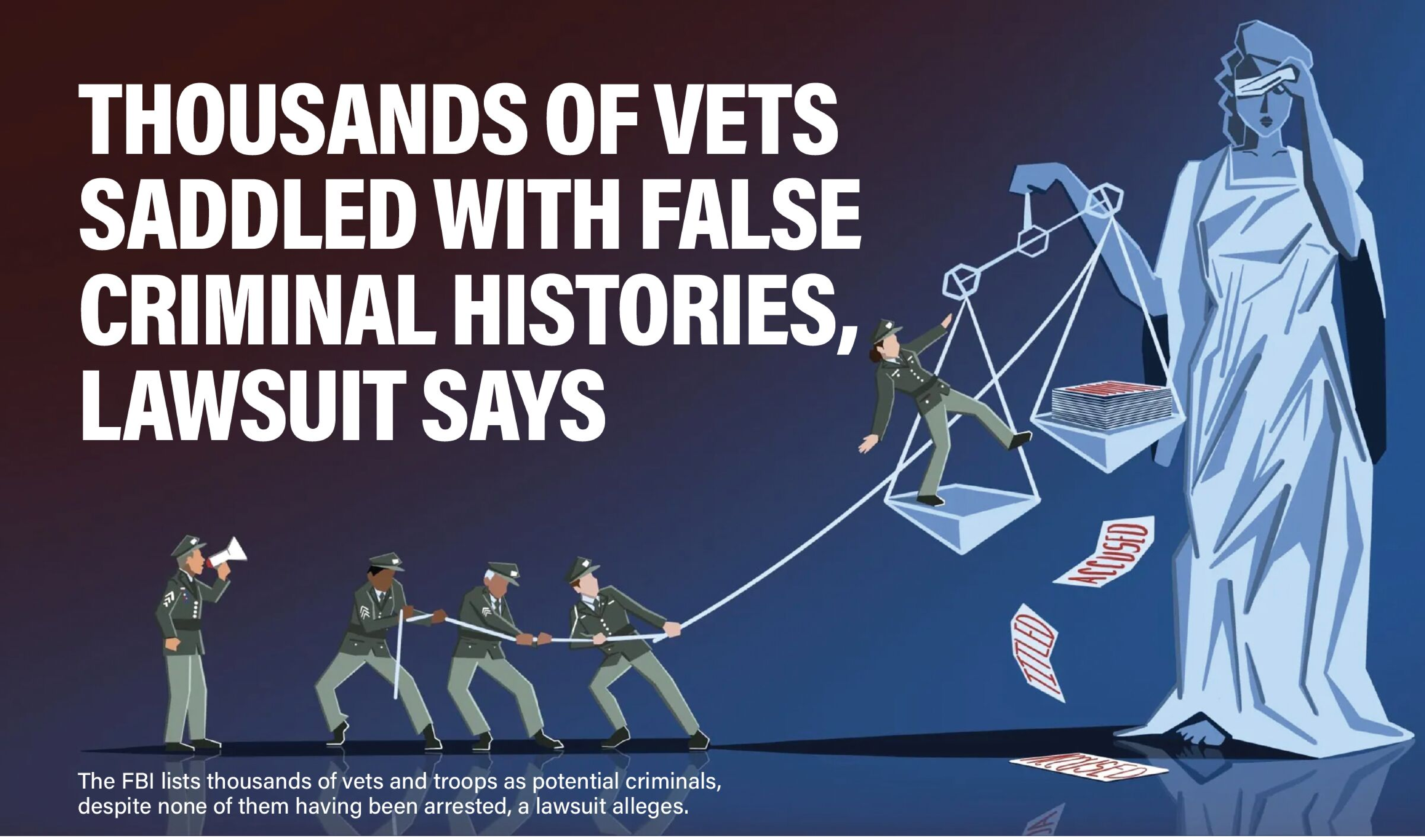
THOUSANDS OF VETS SADDLED WITH FALSE CRIMINAL HISTORIES, LAWSUIT SAYS



The FBI lists thousands of vets and troops as potential criminals, despite none of them having been arrested, a lawsuit alleges.

ERNEST KROI/THE WAR HORSE

Editor's Note: This article first appeared on The War Horse, an award-winning nonprofit news organization educating the public on military service, under the headline: "They've Never Been Arrested. Why Does the FBI List Thousands of Service Members as Potential Criminals?"

BY RACHEL FOBAR, THE WAR HORSE

Denise Rosales has never been arrested.

She's never been handcuffed.

She's never spent a night behind bars, never stood before a judge to profess her innocence.

And yet, if you perform a background check, a criminal database maintained by the FBI will say that she was "arrested or received" into custody and charged with three crimes in January 2021.

While deployed in Kuwait, Rosales, a member of the Texas Army National Guard, threw a birthday party for her husband. Some of the guests allegedly brought alcohol, according to the Army, "in a nation where such substances are illegal." She was investigated and fingerprinted by an Army investigator, but received nothing more than an administrative reprimand.

Still, more than four years later, the Texas mother of two is fighting to clear her name. She's been forced out of her full-time position with the National Guard on a multiagency counterdrug task force, lost job opportunities, and even denied the chance to chaperone her kids on school field trips.

Rosales' saga is the result of a perplexing record-keeping process the military justice system calls "titling"—and it's one that's left potentially thousands of veterans saddled with false criminal histories, according to a lawsuit against the Army and Department of Defense.

The term sounds nonthreatening enough. But in the military, "titling" isn't about taking ownership of a car or property. It's what happens when a service member's name is simply listed as the "subject" in a military criminal investigative report. "Titling does not mean an individual has been arrested, charged or convicted of a crime," a legal assistance document on the Army's website explains.

But here's the problem: Every branch of the military shares titling records in criminal databases with more than two dozen agencies, including the FBI, even if the case was dropped.

The fallout can be devastating because the records are retrievable for decades. Veterans can be passed over for promotions, rejected on apartment applications, and denied firearms clearance, advocates say. With the stain on their record, some struggle to get a job for years.

"Who will take my word over the plain text of the FBI's criminal history?" Rosales, 39, asks in an affidavit in her lawsuit.

She feels betrayed, thinking back to the day when a military recruiter came to her school when she was 17. "I was told the military would guide me in the right direction and have my back," Rosales told The War Horse.

With the Army refusing to budge, Rosales' case has become a showdown over the military's system of titling. Veterans and civil liberties advocates are calling for reforms while victims' groups stress the need for the military to alert civilian law enforcement and employers of the danger among their ranks.

But during a hearing in the ongoing lawsuit, a judge posed a fundamental

LAWSUIT *page 34*

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LAWSUIT *page 32*

question about the service members and veterans like Rosales being wrongfully tagged by the military justice system that even the government's attorney was unable to answer:

Why "is this that big a deal to the Army?"

HOW BIG A PROBLEM IS TITLING?

It's hard to know how many people have been caught up in the quagmire, because there is no requirement to notify service members they've been titled, and many don't find out for years until it turns up, for example, when someone tries to buy a gun, travel abroad, or apply for a job.

The War Horse has filed Freedom of Information Act requests for records from the Department of Defense and National Archives, which houses military criminal files, to reveal how many people have been titled but not court-martialed, but the agencies are not responding to requests during the government shutdown.

Frank Rosenblatt, a former Army prosecutor and an associate professor at the Mississippi College School of Law, estimated the number is at least 10,000 service members and veterans.

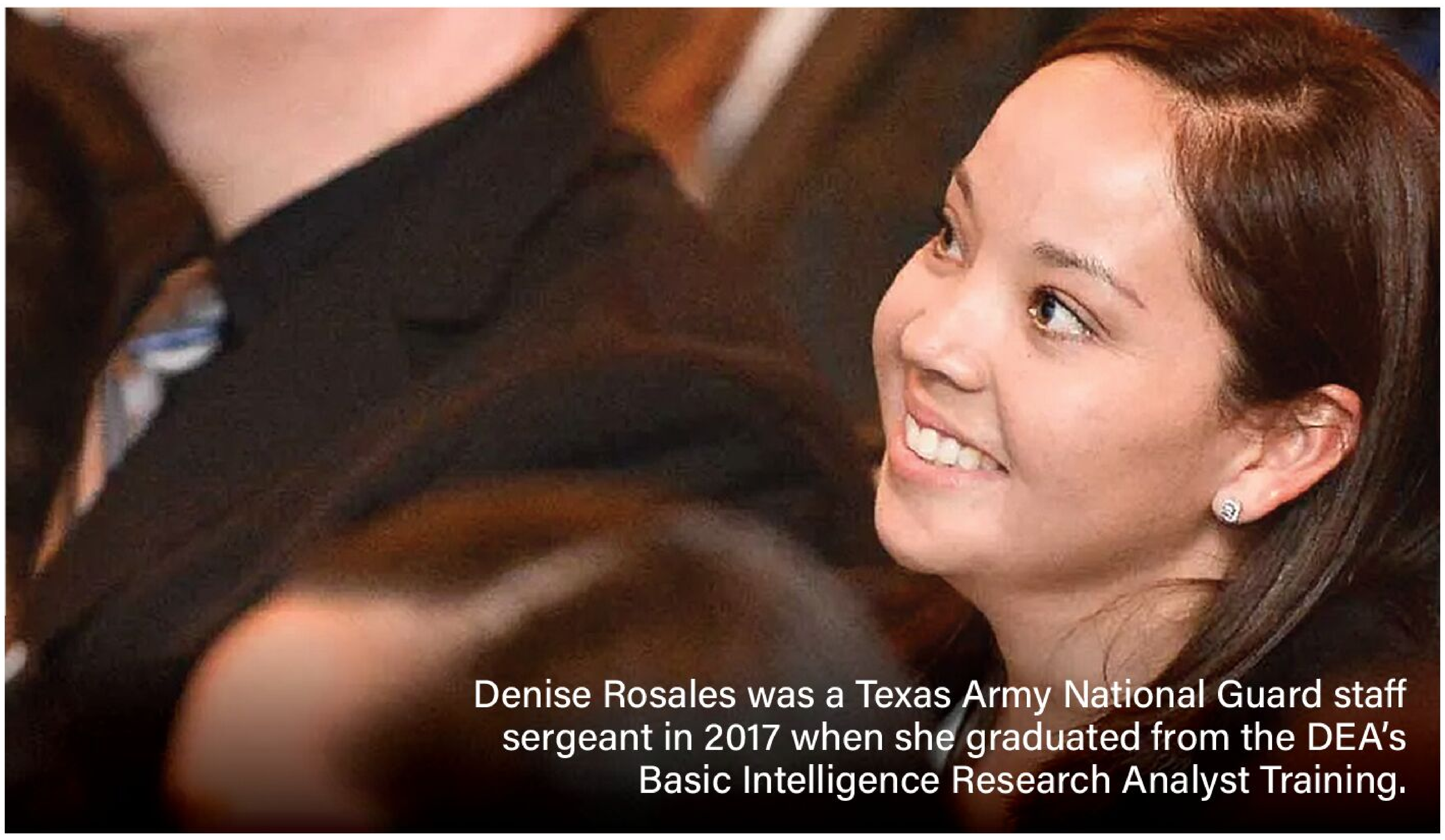
The problem is, our military justice system doesn't "always easily translate over into civilian terms," said Rosenblatt, who has represented titled veterans.

In the military, titling only requires the existence of "credible information" that a crime was committed. "Legally, this is a very low standard, far below the standard required at trial by a court of law," according to Fort Leonard Wood's Army legal assistance office.

"In the vast majority of cases, these [investigators] are young soldiers who don't have any significant level of criminal justice experience, but are somehow vested with tremendous authority to make determinations that follow people for the rest of their lives," said Doug O'Connell, an Austin, Texas-based attorney who is representing Rosales.

And the Department of Defense spells out the other huge hurdle for wrongfully titled service members:

"Once the subject of a criminal investigation is indexed in" the database known as the Defense Central Index of Investigations, the information remains "even if they are found not guilty"—unless DOD law enforcement officials agree to expunge the record.



Denise Rosales was a Texas Army National Guard staff sergeant in 2017 when she graduated from the DEA's Basic Intelligence Research Analyst Training.

SGT. MICHAEL GILES/U.S. ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

But that's a whole separate headache. To appeal, victims of titling are forced—sometimes long after they leave the military—to prove the crime didn't happen, said O'Connell, a former Special Forces colonel in the Army who now specializes in defending military service members.

"They've created a system where you're guilty until proven innocent," he said. "If the [Army Criminal Investigation Division] agent believes something, then you're going to have this criminal history created, and it's up to you to now prove that it didn't happen."

AN OVERCORRECTION?

The Army's Criminal Investigation Division did not respond to multiple interview requests from The War Horse over more than a month of reporting. The United States Attorney's Office, which represents the Army and DOD in Rosales' lawsuit, declined to comment on the case, citing active litigation. The FBI, whose lawyer argued is "simply a clearinghouse" of titling information, was dismissed from the lawsuit.

But even Rosales's legal team acknowledges the logic behind the military sharing criminal records: If someone commits a crime during their military service, civilian law enforcement should be able to know.

"I want my government to keep me safe from people who they know have a propensity for illegality or criminality or violence," said William Thomas, one of Rosales' attorneys and a former Army field artillery officer.

To understand why titling creates chaos in the lives of so many veterans, go back to the pews of a white church in Sutherland Springs, Texas.

Devin Kelley, an Air Force veteran with two domestic assault convictions, opened fire in November 2017 during morning services at the small community church, killing 26 people, several of them children. It was one of the deadliest mass shootings in the state's history.

But why had Kelley been allowed to purchase his semiautomatic rifle, along with the two handguns found in his vehicle, from licensed vendors, given his criminal background?

His convictions during his military service hadn't been entered into the national criminal background system.

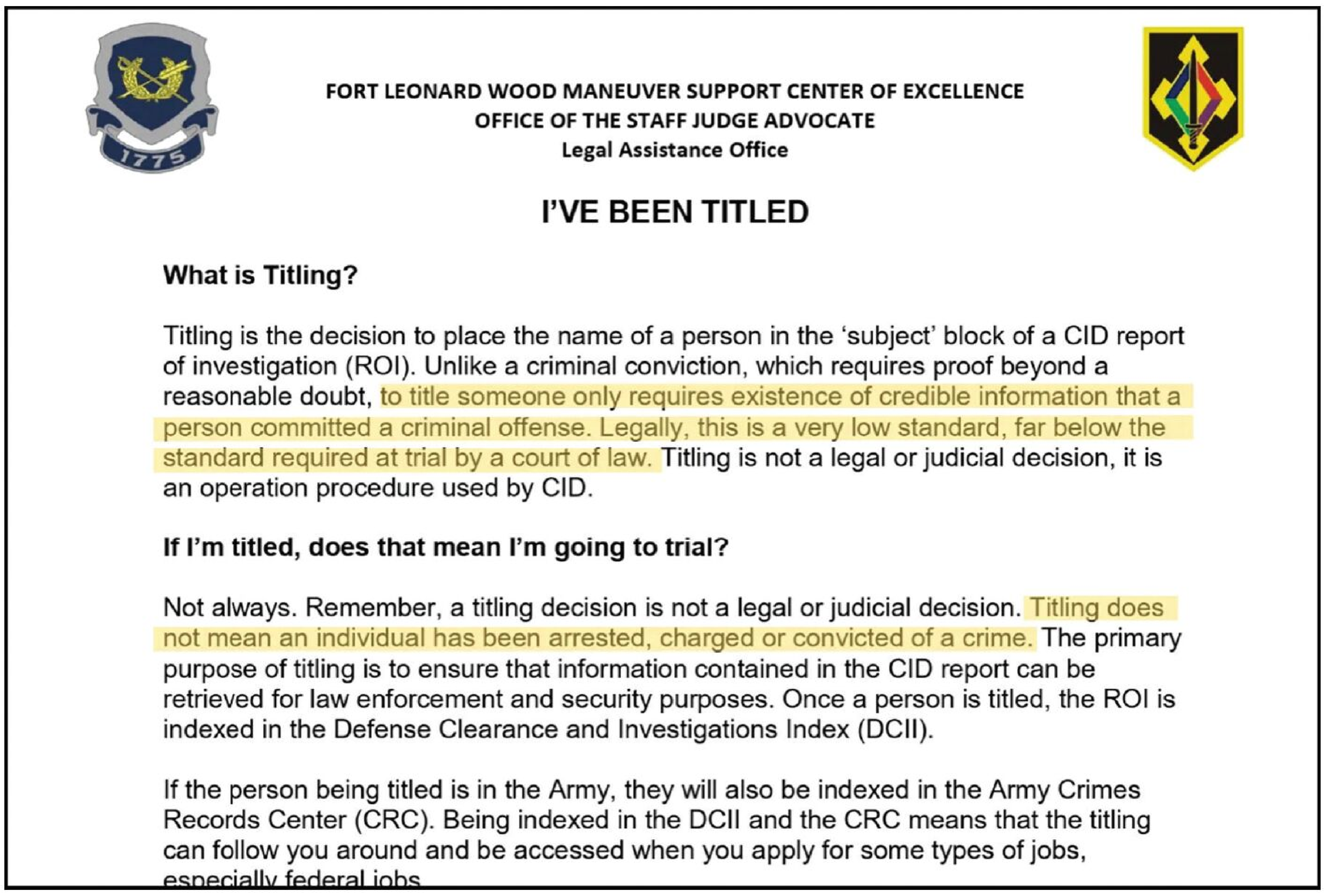
The Department of Defense has long required that criminal history, including fingerprints, be shared with the FBI when a service member is investigated for an offense.

But, as it turns out, the military wasn't very diligent about doing it. After the Texas church shootings, a Pentagon review found that one in four fingerprint cards were not submitted to the FBI, and a 1997 report by the DOD inspector general found that in the Army, fingerprint cards weren't submitted to the FBI in more than 80% of cases.

The public demanded accountability. Victims' families sued the federal government, arguing the Air Force had been negligent in its failure to share Kelley's criminal background, and in 2023, the Department of Justice announced it had reached a tentative settlement of $144.5 million.

In response, the military overcorrected, O'Connell said. After the shootings, the titling problem bloomed into a widespread issue, likely affecting thousands more veterans.

The military doesn't want anyone "to slip through the cracks," Rosenblatt said. In the face of potential lawsuits, there's a strong incentive to share information about veterans' backgrounds, but "they don't have strong incentives for people's privacy and due process."



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I'VE BEEN TITLED

What is Titling?

Titling is the decision to place the name of a person in the 'subject' block of a CID report of investigation (ROI). Unlike a criminal conviction, which requires proof beyond a reasonable doubt, to title someone only requires existence of credible information that a person committed a criminal offense. Legally, this is a very low standard, far below the standard required at trial by a court of law. Titling is not a legal or judicial decision, it is an operation procedure used by CID.

If I'm titled, does that mean I'm going to trial?

Not always. Remember, a titling decision is not a legal or judicial decision. Titling does not mean an individual has been arrested, charged or convicted of a crime. The primary purpose of titling is to ensure that information contained in the CID report can be retrieved for law enforcement and security purposes. Once a person is titled, the ROI is indexed in the Defense Clearance and Investigations Index (DCII).

If the person being titled is in the Army, they will also be indexed in the Army Crimes Records Center (CRC). Being indexed in the DCII and the CRC means that the titling can follow you around and be accessed when you apply for some types of jobs, especially federal jobs.

DISCOVERING HIS OWN VIOLENT ARREST RECORD

The crimes were shocking: Murder. Negligent homicide. Attempted aggravated sexual contact.

It took former Green Beret James Morris four years to get these false charges cleared from his record.

After a fellow soldier was killed during a 2017 hazing incident, one of the assailants claimed Morris had given permission for the attack. Even though Morris hadn't been present for the assault and was never taken into custody or charged, he was fingerprinted and titled during the investigation.

Little did he know that left him with a violent arrest record. He only discovered it in 2021 when he tried to renew his concealed carry license. While the offenses remained on his record, Morris lost his security clearance and was wary of applying for jobs. But one of the worst parts was losing pride in his service.

"They took away from me more than just my career—that's 18 years, 10 months of memories that I can't grapple with prop-

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erly," said Morris, who now works as a contract training analyst at Fort Gordon in Georgia.

For many veterans and service members like Rosales, the ordeal continues—undoing titling is extremely difficult, advocates say. In more than a hundred appeal cases he's filed, O'Connell said he's only been successful once.

Rosales first discovered she had an arrest record when she returned from Kuwait and tried to return to her National Guard-sponsored position as a drug analyst for a counterdrug task force. She sought to have her records corrected in November 2021, but the Army denied her request and appeal over the next two years.

If an "untitling" petition is denied, the next step is to appeal to the Army Board for Correction of Military Records. People have had more success in expunging their records there, O'Connell said, but the process is lengthy, due to a growing backlog of cases. It can take years to get cleared.

"It's hard to prove your innocence," said Liz Ullman, who launched the advocacy group Defend Our Protectors after nearly a thousand service members were caught up in a recruiting scandal. "Which is why you're not supposed to have to."

'I WANT MY CHILDREN TO BE PROUD OF THEIR MOTHER'

The fallout from Rosales' titling record was swift and substantial.

She lost her National Guard job as a criminal analyst in a federal counterdrug task force, which she'd held for 12 years, and cut short her eligibility for retirement benefits, including a pension. In an affidavit, she said she was "reluctant to apply for other Guard employment to save myself from the embarrassment of bringing up my false criminal history." When her security clearance comes up for renewal, she expects it will be revoked.

She sold her home and relocated her family closer to the Mexican border when a commander gave her a chance—despite her record—to work as a first sergeant for Operation Lone Star, a border security initiative launched in 2021 by Texas Gov. Greg Abbott. The false charges continued to come up, blocking her access to certain buildings, she said.

Jamie Morris in Afghanistan in 2007.

COURTESY OF JAMIE MORRIS VIA THE WAR HORSE

What's even more humiliating is that she's been unable to attend her kids' school field trips, which require background checks.

"I want my children to be proud of their mother," she said in the affidavit, "and not ask why I cannot attend a school event."

Still, her case drags on. While a judge in September rejected her legal team's petition to approve the suit as a class action case, the lawyers are still hopeful that a win in Rosales' case could help other wrongfully titled veterans.

The Army's refusal to correct her records hasn't just befuddled her advocates—even the judge presiding in her lawsuit has expressed similar confusion.

'I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY THEY JUST DON'T REMOVE IT'

Back in May 2021, an Army JAG officer confirmed in an email to one of Rosales' lawyers that she had not been arrested for the incident in Kuwait. Despite the acknowledgement, the Army Criminal Investigation Division denied her request and a subsequent appeal to have her records corrected.

Three years later, with her case in U.S. District court, lawyers for both Rosales and the Army were still quibbling before a judge over whether Rosales had been arrested. The Army's lawyer, Matthew Mueller, acknowledged that although Rosales was read her rights, gave a statement, and was fingerprinted and photographed, she was never detained in jail or handcuffed.

By 37 pages into the hearing transcript, U.S. District Judge David A. Ezra seemed exasperated.

"What is a little aggravating is we don't really have an explanation from the Army as to why they haven't changed her record," he said at the May 2024 court hear-

LAWSUIT *page 39*

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LAWSUIT *page 36*

ing. “Apparently, she wasn’t charged. I mean, I don’t understand why they don’t just remove it.”

In an order two weeks later, Ezra doubled down on his point: “Defendants provided no explanation as to why they would not change her record,” he wrote. “One could only speculate as to why the Army would defend a record that is not accurate of the events that took place.”

Now, with both sides awaiting the judge’s decision on whether the case should move to trial, frustration is mounting for Rosales and her legal team.

“Do I really have to stand in front of a federal judge, a lifetime appointee, a third co-equal branch of government, and say, ‘Judge, I just want the Army to stop lying about my client?’” asked Thomas, one of her attorneys. “Is that really how far I have to go?”

REFORMING A ‘GIANT ORGANIZATIONAL DEFECT’

The solution to this issue seems simple enough, advocates say: The titling process needs reform.

Derrick Miller, the director of the Congressional Justice for Warriors Caucus, which advocates for wrongly accused veterans, has lobbied for a legislative amendment that would require that titling records be deleted after 10 years if the service member will not be charged or court-martialed over the allegation. These reforms would ensure due process and prevent an accusation from having the same consequences as a conviction, Miller said.

U.S. Rep. Eli Crane, an Arizona Republican and former Navy SEAL, introduced the amendment in August.

“Far too often, the reputation of our brave service members is unfairly tarnished due to titling,” Crane told The War Horse, calling the amendment a “sensible approach to protecting the livelihoods of our courageous veterans.”

Reforming the titling system is common sense, experts say. The military’s system of titling is a “giant organizational defect,” said Robert Bracknell, a retired Marine armor officer and an adjunct professor at William & Mary Law School.

Denise Rosales, pictured above during a DEA Basic Intelligence Research Analyst Training graduation, lost her position on a joint counterdrug task force.

COURTESY OF JAMIE MORRIS VIA THE WAR HORSE

There’s little incentive for the military to change the titling process, Rosenblatt added. “This isn’t a politically powerful block of the military,” he said, referring to those who’ve been unfairly titled. “It’s often people who are on the outs with their command, and they end up being investigated.”

The issue needs a champion, Bracknell said.

Rosales could be that champion. But her team wonders why she needs to be.

“Why are they fighting so hard to preserve something so wrong?” O’Connell asks. “As a guy who spent 30 years in the Army, I’m completely disgusted.” ■

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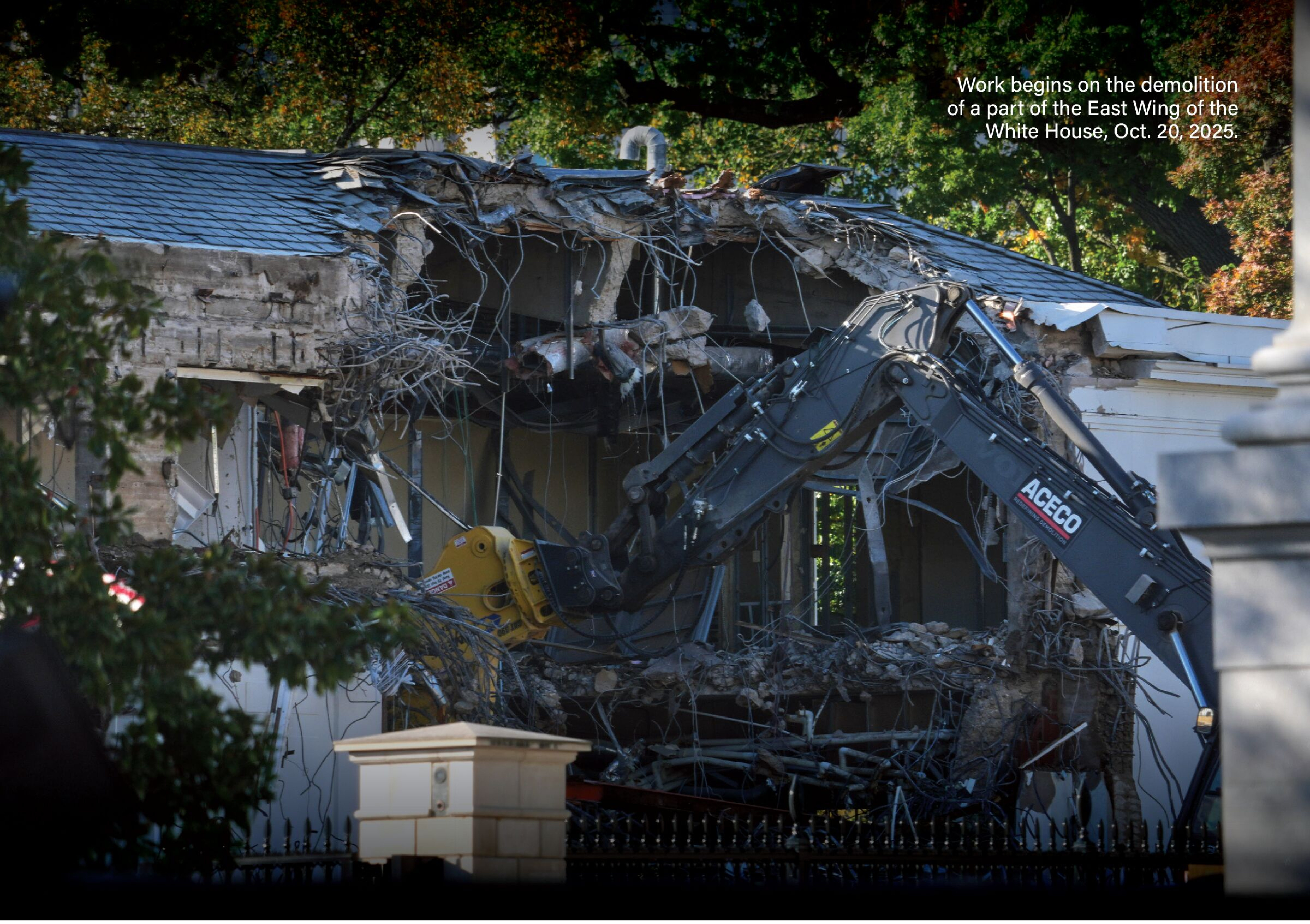
Work begins on the demolition of a part of the East Wing of the White House, Oct. 20, 2025.

EVAN VUCCI/AP PHOTO

THE WWII ORIGINS OF THE (NOW DEMOLISHED) EAST WING OF THE WHITE HOUSE

BY CLAIRE BARRETT

President Donald Trump on Monday acknowledged his project to demolish the White House East Wing to add a $250 million, 90,000-square-foot ballroom.

The building's many reconstruction and remodeling efforts since construction began in 1792 have drawn media, congressional and public ire.

This one has been no different.

Trump's mention of the project, on the day the demolition began, came at an event honoring the Louisiana State University and Louisiana State University at Shreveport baseball teams.

"Right on the other side, you have a lot of construction going on, which you might hear periodically," Trump said.

The long-touted project was addressed by White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt in July, with Leavitt saying the "state ballroom" would occupy space now occupied by the current White House East Wing.

"For more than 150 years, every President has dreamt about having a Ballroom at the White House to accommodate people for grand parties, State Visits, etc.," the president wrote on his Truth Social platform.

"I am pleased to announce that ground has been broken on the White House grounds to build the new, big, beautiful White House Ballroom.

"Completely separate from the White House itself, the East Wing is being fully modernized as part of this process, and will be more beautiful than ever when it is complete!"

Originally constructed in 1902 by President Theodore Roosevelt, the structure that would come to be known as the East Wing was fully constructed under the administration of Roosevelt's distant cousin and the 32nd U.S. president, Franklin D. Roosevelt.

After the U.S. entered World War II, Roosevelt, seeing the need to house additional staff and offices to reflect the growing complexity of the federal government at the time, oversaw the addition of the East Wing in 1942, according to the White House.

The two-story structure was built atop the Presidential Emergency Operations Center, or PEOC, a secure bunker that was built by FDR to serve as a secure

EAST WING *page 42*

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President Franklin Roosevelt signs what would become known as the GI Bill in his office, June 22, 1944.

FDR LIBRARY PHOTO COLLECTION

EAST WING *page 40*

meeting place in the event of an emergency.

"While the exact specification of this underground presidential bunker is classified," according to the White House, "it was originally built to withstand a direct nuclear hit. Access to the PEOC is by an elevator located behind multiple vault-type doors with biometric access control systems."

The project, however, was not without its critics.

The construction of the wing was highly controversial during the war, with congressional Republicans labeling the expenditure as wasteful, while others accused Roosevelt of using the project to bolster his own image.

First lady Eleanor Roosevelt maintained the first social secretary for a first lady in the East Wing, and with the conclusion of the war, the East Wing evolved into the space where first ladies maintained offices. First ladies have kept their own offices there, starting with President Jimmy Carter's wife, Rosalynn Carter.

Designated a historic site by Congress in 1961, the National Park Service oversees care of the White House and its grounds. The agency decreed in September 2014 that it would work with presidential administrations, the Secret Service and other agencies "to ensure both the preservation and use of one of the most recognized houses in the world."

The White House, the Supreme Court building, the Capitol and all their "related buildings and grounds" are exempt from the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, which requires federal agencies "initiate measures necessary to direct their policies, plans and programs in such a way that federally owned sites ... are preserved, restored and maintained for the inspiration and benefit of the people." Consultations to change such properties or grounds under the act require a formal review process. The White House does not have such limitations.

Instead, the White House has its own committee, The Committee for the Preservation of the White House, which is chaired by the director of Park Service and made up of federal officials and members appointed by the president.

Last week, during a dinner with tech, finance and defense industry executives, Trump relayed to the audience that he was told that there were "zero zoning conditions" set for the project.

"I said, 'How long will it take me?'" Trump said.

"'Sir, you can start tonight, you have no approvals.' I said, 'You gotta be kidding.' They said, 'Sir, this is the White House, you're the president of the United States, you can do anything you want.'"

Despite this, there is growing outrage over the project with the Society of Architectural Historians releasing a statement urging Trump to work with historians and architects alike, writing:

"While we recognize that the White House is a building with evolving needs, and that it has undergone various exterior and interior modifications since construction began in 1792," the society wrote, "the proposed ballroom will be the first major change to its exterior appearance in the last 83 years (since the East Wing in its current form was built in 1942).

"Therefore, such a significant change to a historic building of this import should follow a rigorous and deliberate design and review process." ■

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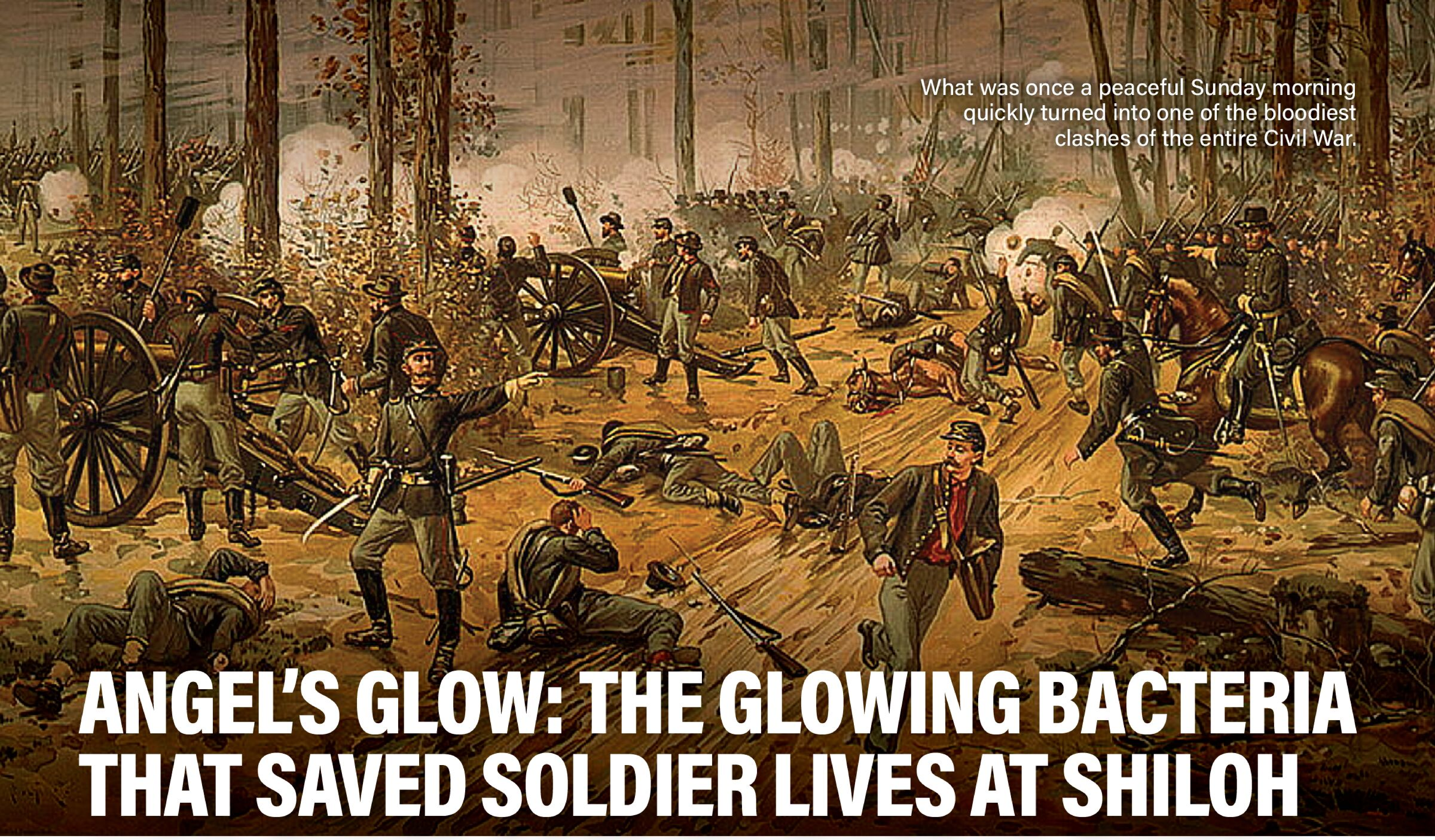

What was once a peaceful Sunday morning quickly turned into one of the bloodiest clashes of the entire Civil War.

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ANGEL'S GLOW: THE GLOWING BACTERIA THAT SAVED SOLDIER LIVES AT SHILOH

BY CLAIRE BARRETT

Wounded soldiers glowing with a greenish-blue. Those soldiers inexplicably recovering more quickly than others.

This story of the Battle of Shiloh, one that was only explained in 2001, in part by two high school students in Maryland, begins on April 6, 1862.

Dawn was breaking near a small Methodist meeting house in Hardin County, in southwestern Tennessee, and the Union army was not expecting much trouble.

The Union Army of the Tennessee had routed Confederate forces at Forts Donelson and Henry a few weeks before and had hunkered down in Hardin County. The confident Union forces had constructed no defensive works around their camp.

Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, the commander, was 20 miles away, meeting with Maj. Gen. Don Carlos Buell, head of the Army of the Ohio.

Soon, the Union men were roused from their slumber by nearly 45,000 Confederate troops, organized into four corps of the Army of the Mississippi, under the command of Gen. Albert Sidney Johnston.

What had been a peaceful Sunday morning soon turned into one of the bloodiest clashes of the Civil War.

There were an estimated 23,746 casualties over the two-day battle. On the Union side, 1,754 men were killed and 8,408 wounded. The Confederates suffered similar losses, with 1,728 killed and 8,012 wounded.

With field medicine still primitive during the early days of the war and germ theory still a relatively new concept, hundreds of wounded men were left to wait for aid in the rain on a muddy battlefield.

However, as day turned into night, shockingly, some of the surviving wounded began to glow a greenish-blue hue. Moreover, doctors and medical personnel later reported that those with glowing wounds had lower infection rates and healed much more quickly than those without them.

The other-worldly phenomenon was quickly dubbed the "Angel's Glow" by soldiers for its seemingly healing properties. It would take 139 years to apparently unravel the mystery surrounding the glow.

In 2001, high school students Bill Martin and Jonathan Curtis worked with Martin's mother, Agricultural Research Service microbiologist Phyllis Martin, to root out its source. According to the Agriculture Department, she had "studied the bacterium, Photorhabdus luminescens, as a potential biocontrol agent and knew that this insect pathogen created a glowing effect."

The students found that the Photorhabdus strains produced antibiotics that inhibited growth of other bacteria that would have caused infections in open wounds.

It was known that the glowing bacteria live in the guts of nematodes, small parasitic worms, Curtis said in a 2001 interview with HealthDay, "and we found that these nematodes are attracted to small insects that would have been in the guts or clothing of the soldiers, and [the worms] would have excreted glowing bacteria."

The process released chemicals that ate away at serious bacterial infections such as gangrene. The cold and wet conditions after the battle likely made it the perfect hosting conditions for the worm and bacteria — and likely helped the soldiers survive the night.

Melissa A. Winn, director of marketing and communications at the National Museum of Civil War Medicine in Frederick, Maryland, told Military Times, "Angel's Glow was a true phenomenon and one of those stories about Civil War medicine ... that they hear questions about often."

"What's exciting is the interest in determining 'why.' It's part of our mission to use artifacts, storytelling and historic lessons to educate the public and define the impact on today's society. We continue to learn from and benefit from Civil War medicine." ■

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The cemetery, consisting of 639 acres, is the final resting place of approximately 400,000 veterans and their dependents.

NATHAN HOWARD/AP

THE MOST DANGEROUS GRAVESITE IN THE US RESIDES IN ARLINGTON CEMETERY

BY CLAIRE BARRETT

It had been nearly five years since Winston Churchill had declared that "an iron curtain has descended across the continent," and plunged the West in a Cold War and a hot race for armament with the East.

Yet worlds away from Washington and Moscow, in a remote outpost 40 miles west of Idaho Falls, Idaho, a town would soon become home to America's first nuclear accident.

On Jan. 3, 1961, operators from the U.S. Army's Stationary Lower Power Reactor One, or SL-1, were returning from a 10-day holiday break.

Among them was Army Spc. John Arthur Byrnes, Navy Seabee Richard Carlton Legg and SP4 Richard McKinley.

SL-1 was designed to provide heat and electricity for remote Defense Early Warning system radar sites, established to provide early warning of attack by Soviet aircraft or ICBMs, supplementing conventional plants requiring costly and hazardous diesel deliveries.

However, poor oversight, lack of rigorous training and detailed procedures and inadequately tested technology spelled disaster for SL-1 and its operators that night when, shortly after 9 p.m., a steam explosion blasted through the plant.

According to Argon Electronics, which provides nuclear and other hazardous material training simulators, the blast had enough force to lift the whole 26,000-pound apparatus over 9 feet into the air and create 500 pounds per square inch of pressure "which forced the plugs at the top of the reactor open and fire the control rods like missiles into the ceiling."

"The entire reactor room was instantly filled with burning steam contaminated water and fragments of the radioactive cores," Argon said.

It would take over an hour and a half for responders to arrive at the reactor, and when they did, they found dangerous levels of radiation.

Byrnes and Carlton were killed almost instantly in the blast. McKinley was still breathing, but the 27-year-old succumbed to his injuries shortly after being transported into an ambulance.

An Atomic Energy Commission investigation found the explosion had been caused by an operator pulling the reactor's central rod too far out of its housing and, according to NASA, "This withdrawal caused the reactor to go 'supercritical' in just 4 milliseconds as the core power level surged to 20,000 megawatts or over 6,000 times the rated power output."

It was speculated that the rod had become stuck, resulting in an operative accidentally pulling it too hard to free it. Others say it was the simply the result of human error.

Brynes and Legg were buried in their hometowns but McKinley, a Korean War veteran, was laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery at the behest of his wife.

Twenty-two days after the explosion, McKinley's family gathered in Arlington, Virginia, to watch the veteran's eight-minute funeral — from 20 feet away.

Laid to rest in a double lead-lined casket, McKinley was lowered into a 10-foot-grave encased in concrete and surrounded by a metal vault. For good measure an additional foot of concrete was poured in atop his casket.

McKinley's gravesite remains the only radioactive burial plot in Arlington National cemetery, and while it is safe to visit, his cemetery file warns, "Victim of nuclear accident. Body is contaminated with long-life radioactive isotopes. Under no circumstance will the body be removed from this location without prior approval of the AEC [Atomic Energy Commission] in consultation with this headquarters." ■

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Rami Malek and Russell Crowe attend the AFI premiere of “Nuremberg” on Oct. 24, 2025.

PATRICK T. FALLON/AFP/GETTY

‘NUREMBERG’ TO CAPTURE CAT-AND-MOUSE GAME BETWEEN GÖRING, CAPTORS

BY CLAIRE BARRETT

On May 8, 1945, “der dicke Hermann,” or “Fat Herman” to the German public, stepped out of his vehicle.

With the writing on the wall, Hermann Göring, the leader of the Luftwaffe, had surrendered to the Americans.

“Twelve years,” he purportedly muttered. “I’ve had a good run for my money.”

Now, based on Jack El-Hai’s book “The Nazi and the Psychiatrist,” director James Vanderbilt is bringing Göring’s 18-month incarceration and trial to the big screen in “Nuremberg.”

Starring Rami Malek as Lt. Col. Douglas Kelley, the U.S. Army psychiatrist assigned to interview the Nazi leader, the film follows Malek’s character as he interrogates Göring, played by Russell Crowe.

Held alongside 51 senior Nazi leaders, Göring was confined in Prisoner of War Camp No. 32, known to its inmates as the “Ashcan.” Kelley was the first Allied psychiatrist to evaluate him and other Nazi leaders such as Rudolf Hess, Julius Streicher and Karl Dönitz. His work, however, has been largely overshadowed by that of Gustave Gilbert, the psychologist brought in to reevaluate his findings.

According to historian James Holland, “Göring’s dandy image made him a persistent figure of ridicule. Germans mocked him and the foreign press painted him as an overweight buffoon. But Göring was a colossus in every way: a wily Machiavellian with an outsize IQ, skilled at combining charm, guile and ruthlessness to get what he wanted — skills he employed to the end.”

“I responded to the script straight away, but in a funny way I was also emotionally exhausted by it,” Crowe told the news site Deadline. “How would you even attempt to play that guy? When that kind of question comes up, that’s usually what I’m attracted to.”

During his incarceration Göring lost weight, detoxed from his steady war diet of morphine, and, writes Holland, “demonstrated acute intelligence, guile, wit and even charm.”

While imprisoned, the Nazi managed to befriend his guard, Lt. Jack G. Wheelis, and physician Ludwig Pflücker. During the trial, he ran rings around his prosecutor, even managing to draw laughter from onlookers.

It is, though, the psychological duel between Kelley and Göring that appears to be at the heart of “Nuremberg” — until a vial of cyanide spared Göring the noose.

“He couldn’t help but empathize with [Göring],” Malek told Deadline. “For Kelley to be so convinced that he was there to ‘dissect evil,’ as he explains in his book, and then to discover there’s nothing uniquely evil about Göring; in fact, there’s humanity in there. He realized that anyone at any moment in any political landscape could be capable of an atrocity like that. How jarring, and how absolutely terrifying that must have been.”

Joining Malek and Crowe is Michael Shannon, playing chief U.S. prosecutor, Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson; Leo Woodall as Sgt. Howie Triest; Colin Hanks as American psychologist Gustave Gilbert; and John Slattery as Burton C. Andrus, U.S. Army officer and commandant of the Nuremberg Prison. ■

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SCAN TO READ SUCCESSES

Rick Holland, son of Melvin Holland, sits on the summit of Phou Pha Thi in 2025.

STAFF SGT. BLAKE GONZALES/AIR FORCE

HE WAS AWARDED A SILVER STAR FOR A BATTLE THE US SAID NEVER HAPPENED

BY RICHARD SISK

In just one week in February 1968 America would suffer the highest casualties of the Vietnam War — from North Vietnam's Tet Offensive, the battles of Hue and Quang Tri and the siege of Khe Sanh, the news out of southeast Asia was very bad to dismal.

But it wasn't even the full picture.

For decades, the battle of Lima Site 85 — a top-secret American tactical air navigation radar site atop at 5,800-foot-high mountaintop 15 miles from the North Vietnamese border — would remain secret, unreported.

While "officially neutral," Laos helped to pit communist Pathet Lao rebels backed by North Vietnam against the U.S.-supported royal Laotian government, which received assistance from CIA paramilitary advisers, Thai mercenaries and fighters from the Hmong mountain tribes.

The U.S. ambassador to Laos, William H. Sullivan, was reluctant to further violate supposed Laotian neutrality and forbade American troops to defend the Lima 85 radar site despite an enemy response that was sure to come, writes historian Don Holloway.

On his initial survey of the site in July 1966, 7th Air Force mission coordinator Lt. Col. Robert C. Seitzberg gave its crew "six months if they were lucky."

And come they did.

On the night of March 10-11, 1968, under cover of a massive artillery and an infantry assault on the mountain, a team of North Vietnamese sappers scaled the steep cliffs, overran the radar site and, according to Air and Space Forces Magazine, killed more than half of the Americans they found there.

"We had intended and planned for a long time to liberate the Pha Thi area," wrote Maj. Do Chi Ben of the North Vietnamese Army in a 1996 Vietnamese-published book about the raid. "In 1966, in addition to sending a reconnaissance element to prepare the Pha Thi battlefield, [Northwest Military Region headquarters] gave particular attention to developing and training a sapper [commando] team that would practice deep penetration and methods of attacking targets atop karst [limestone] mountains."

On Aug. 11, 2025, 57 years after the battle, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the recovery of

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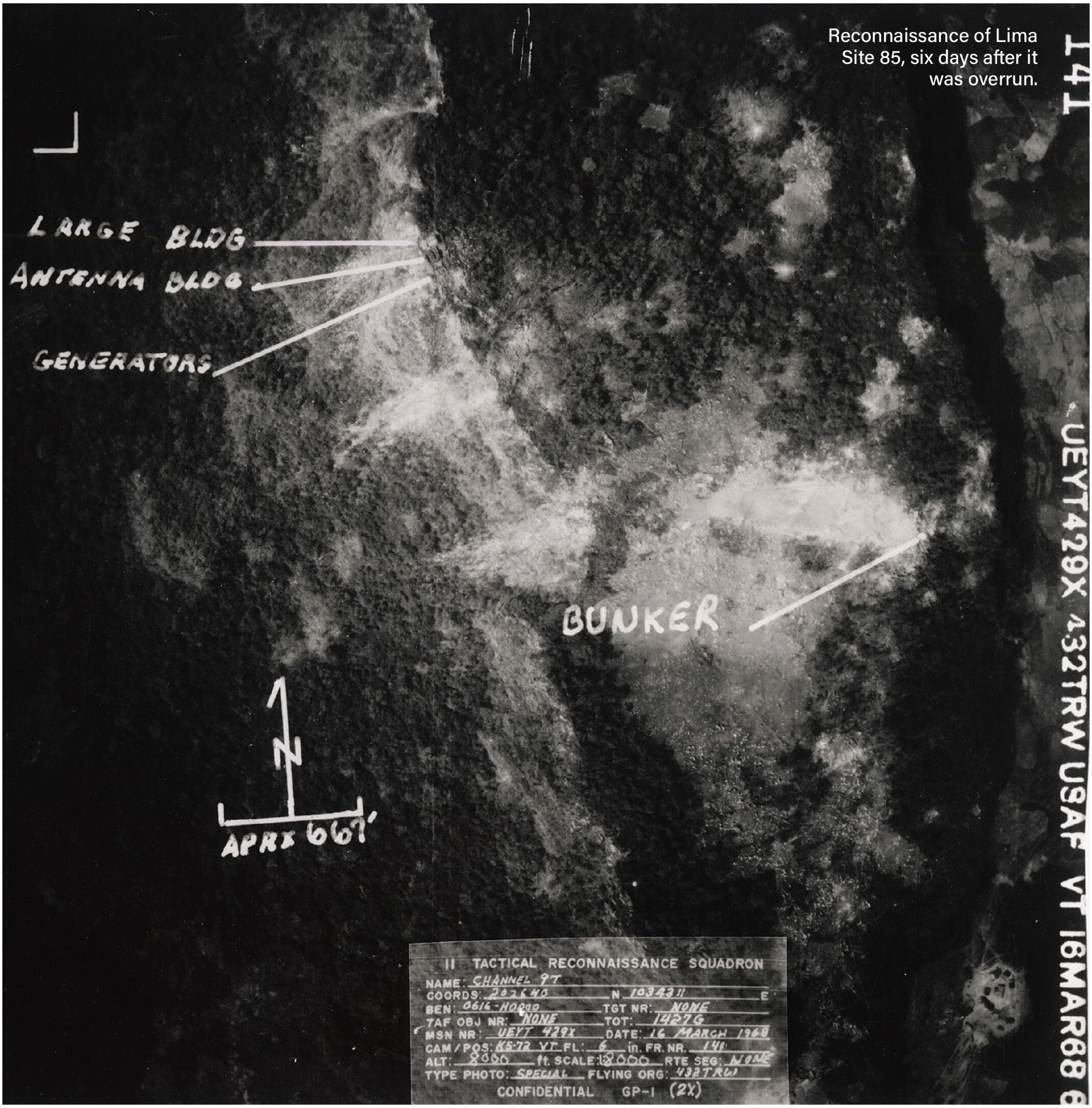

Reconnaissance of Lima Site 85, six days after it was overrun.

II TACTICAL RECONNAISSANCE SQUADRON
NAME: CHANNEL 97
COORDS: 202640 N 103431 E
BEN: 0616-H0000 TGT NR: NONE
7AF OBJ NR: NONE TOT: 1427G
MSN NR: UEYT 429X DATE: 16 MARCH 1968
CAM/POS: KS-72 VT FL: 6 in. FR. NR. 141
ALT: 8000 ft. SCALE: 18000 RTE SEG: NONE
TYPE PHOTO: SPECIAL FLYING ORG: 432TRW
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AIR FORCE

SILVER STAR *page 50*

Air Force Master Sgt. James Henry Calfee, then 26, of Boling, Texas.

The DPAA announcement states that more details on the Calfee identification will be released once his family is fully briefed, but the release appears to be delayed by the government shutdown, which was ongoing as of press time.

In June, DPAA announced that the remains of three others who fell in the battle on the mountain had been identified: Tech. Sgt. Donald Kennebunk Springsteadah; Staff Sgt. Henry Gerald Gish; and Tech. Sgt. Willis Rozelle Hall.

After accounts of what happened in defense of the mountaintop TACAN (Tactical Air Navigation) site were finally declassified in 1988, Calfee's valor atop the sheer cliff of the Phou Pha Thi mountain was finally recognized.

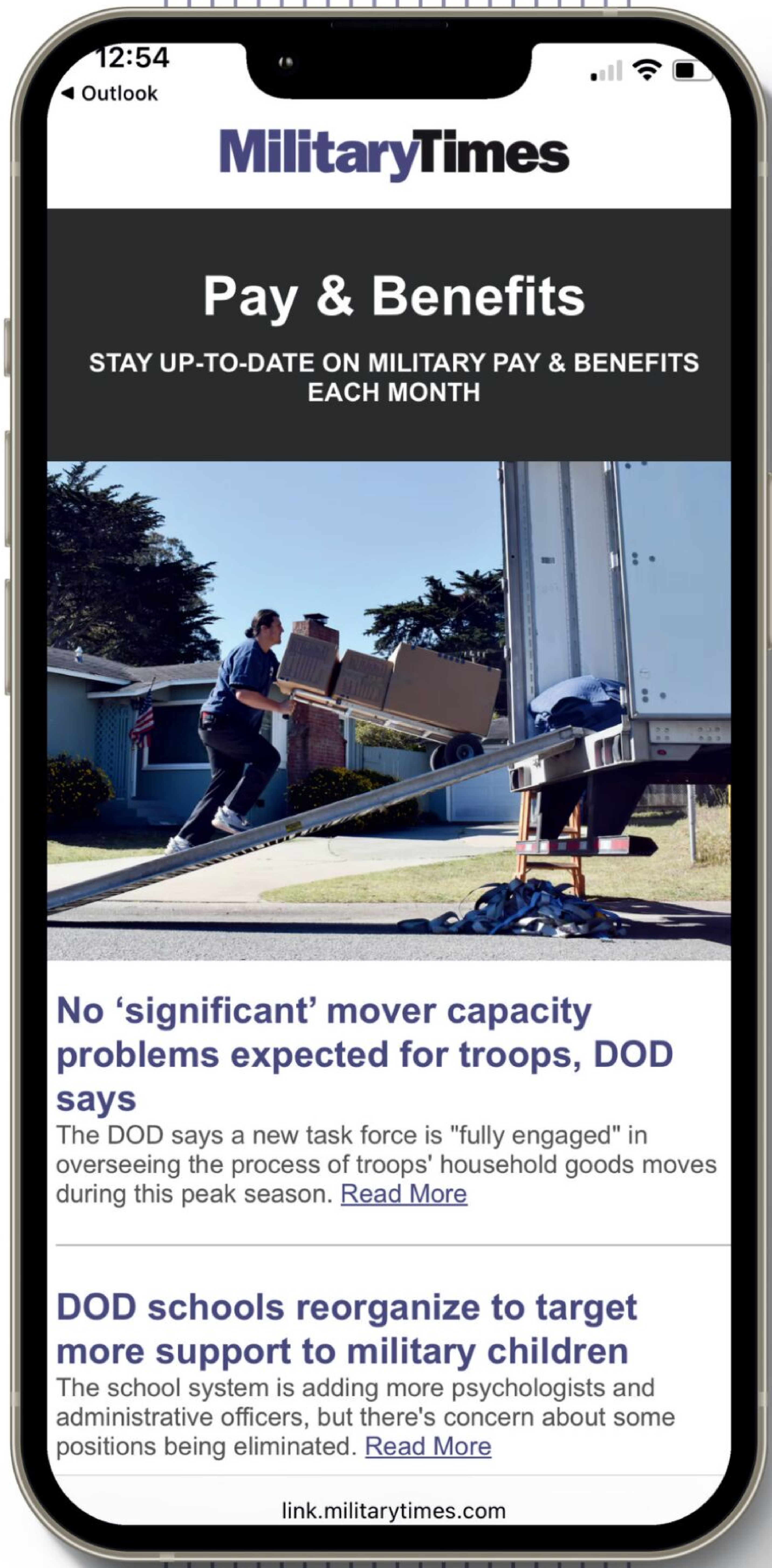
Calfee was posthumously awarded the Silver Star in 2012 for his actions in the firefight that resulted in the deaths of 12 Airmen.

It marked the single worst ground combat loss for the Air Force in the Vietnam War.

Calfee was wounded in the initial attack on the site but continued to fire on the enemy, according to his citation.

"Wounded and continuing to use his personal weapon, he drew many of the enemy forces away from another team located on the side of the mountain," his citation reads. "His individual act

SILVER STAR *page 54*



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SILVER STAR *page 52*

of bravery, at the sacrifice of his life, ultimately enabled five of his comrades to reach the rescue helicopter at daybreak."

By drawing away the enemy, Calfee enabled Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Richard Loy Etchberger, then 25, of Hamburg, Pennsylvania, to get several of the wounded on the mountain ledge onto a helicopter hoist.

Etchberger was the last to be lifted out but he was struck by a rifle round just after being pulled aboard the helicopter and died before the helo could reach medical help.

Forty-two years after his selfless actions, Etchberger was awarded the Medal of Honor at a White House Ceremony in September 2010.

The North Vietnamese cadre's 1996 account of the battle by the People's Army of Vietnam grudgingly allowed that a rescue helicopter managed to lift several Americans off the ledge while the attacking force sought to regroup.

The account stated that "one helicopter dropped a line down near the TACAN site and rescued three wounded enemy. We were tangled up in the mountain, so we fired on it without hitting it."

On March 11, 1968, Ambassador Sullivan sent a cable to the State Department on the fall of Lima Site 85: "It appears we may have pushed our luck one day too long in attempting to keep this facility in operation."

In all, a total of 12 U.S. personnel serving with Detachment 1 of the 1043rd Radar Evaluation Squadron were killed or categorized as missing and presumed dead.

Calfee was among the missing until a recovery operation on the mountain in northern Houaphan province identified material that allowed for Calfee's name to be removed from the list of the missing personnel.

The identifications of Calfee and the three other service members yielded a clearer picture of what had transpired, and why, in what has since been described as a "battle above the clouds" on Phou Pha Thi mountain, one that ended one of the oddest and most secretive U.S. military operations of the last century.

Ridgeline of Lima Site 85.

AIR FORCE

It began with a now-declassified April 1967 memo from Army Gen. Earle Wheeler, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to Defense Secretary Robert McNamara urging approval for the placement of advanced TSQ-81 radars and Air Force personnel to run them at Lima Site 85 to give U.S. bombers and attack aircraft all weather precision targeting.

Wheeler was wary of violating the 1962 Geneva agreements signed by the U.S. barring foreign militaries from neutral Laos, but he suggested a way around the prohibition that would put Air Force technicians at Lima Site and also give them a semblance of what spies would call "plausible deniability" if things went wrong.

"If it became necessary, in the interest of Laos political considerations, these personnel could be placed under 'shallow cover' (i.e., wear civilian clothing, use civilian titles and identification documents, and be supported by a local contractor as are the TACAN personnel at the site) in order to conceal their identity as military personnel," Wheeler's memo said.

In the ranks, the process of instantly transforming military personnel into civilians was called "sheep dipping."

The plan concocted by the high command led the Air Force to summon its best enlisted technicians to Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana, where they were asked to volunteer for the Lima Site 85 mission and sign papers resigning from the Air Force.

After signing and being categorized as civilians, they were asked to sign more papers making them nominal employes of the Lockheed Aircraft Corp.

The deal was that they would be brought back into the Air Force once the mission was completed and, if they were killed or went missing in Laos, their families would get full military benefits.

The volunteers, and even their wives, were sworn to secrecy about what and where the mission was. To keep up the ruse, the volunteers wore civilian clothes on the site and were mostly unarmed.

It was an open secret in Saigon that the U.S. was bombing sections of the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos with CIA operatives on the ground and using the CIA-operated Air America cargo flights in an effort to prop up the shaky government of Prince Souvanna Phouman.

However, President Richard Nixon maintained the fiction that no U.S. troops were on the ground in Laos and none had been killed.

In a lengthy March 1970 statement, Nixon said he felt compelled to counter "grossly inaccurate" media reports that "American ground forces are engaged in combat in Laos and that our air activity has had the effect of escalating the conflict."

He ignored the loss of life at Lima Site 85, stating "No American stationed in Laos has ever been killed in ground combat operations."

For years, the families of those missing at Lima Site 85 were given only the barest and most misleading details of what had happened — just that their loved one was missing in action, the body not recovered, somewhere in Southeast Asia.

"We didn't know any of the details about what happened to Dad," Cory Etchberger, the son of Medal of Honor

SILVER STAR *page 56*

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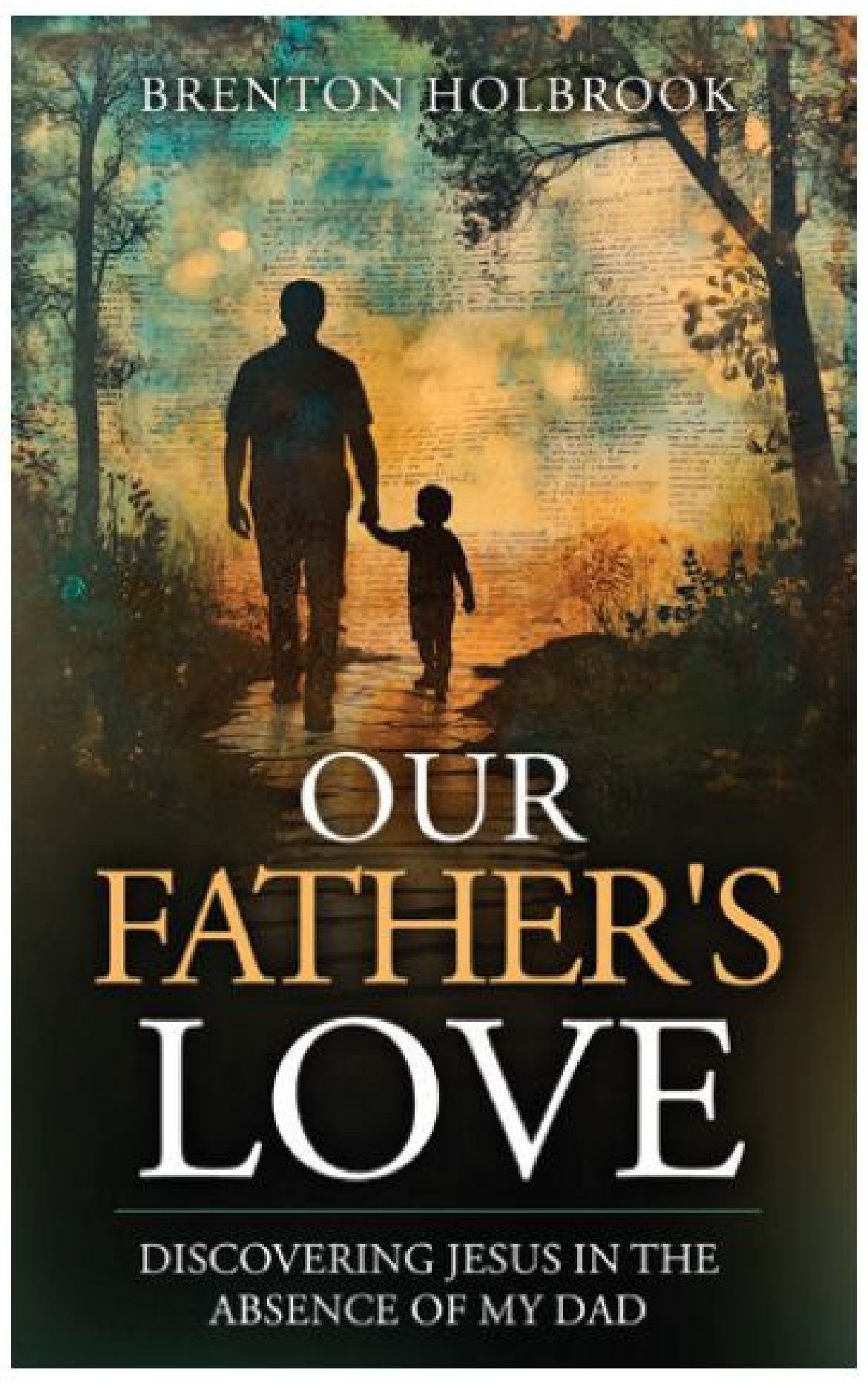
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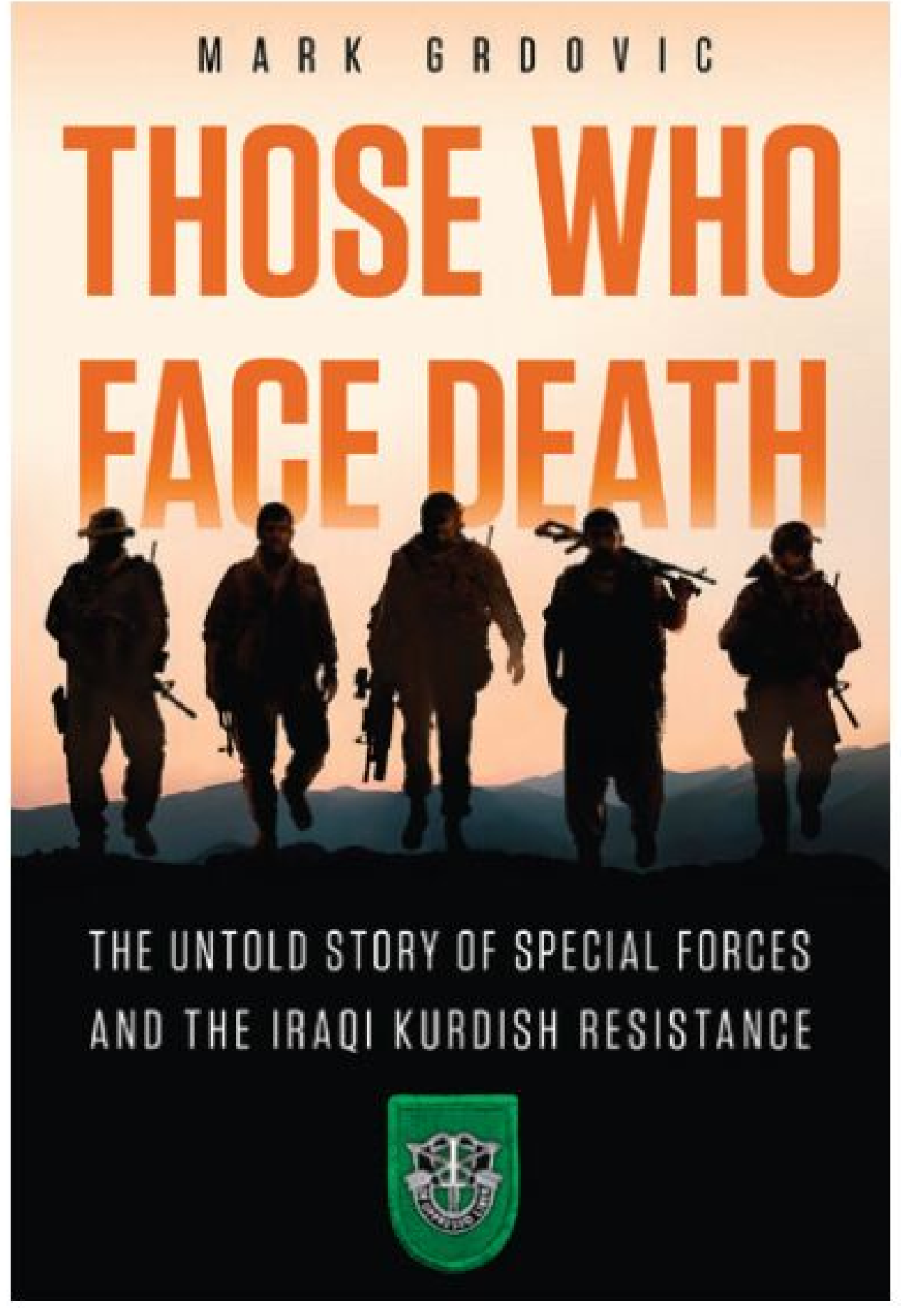
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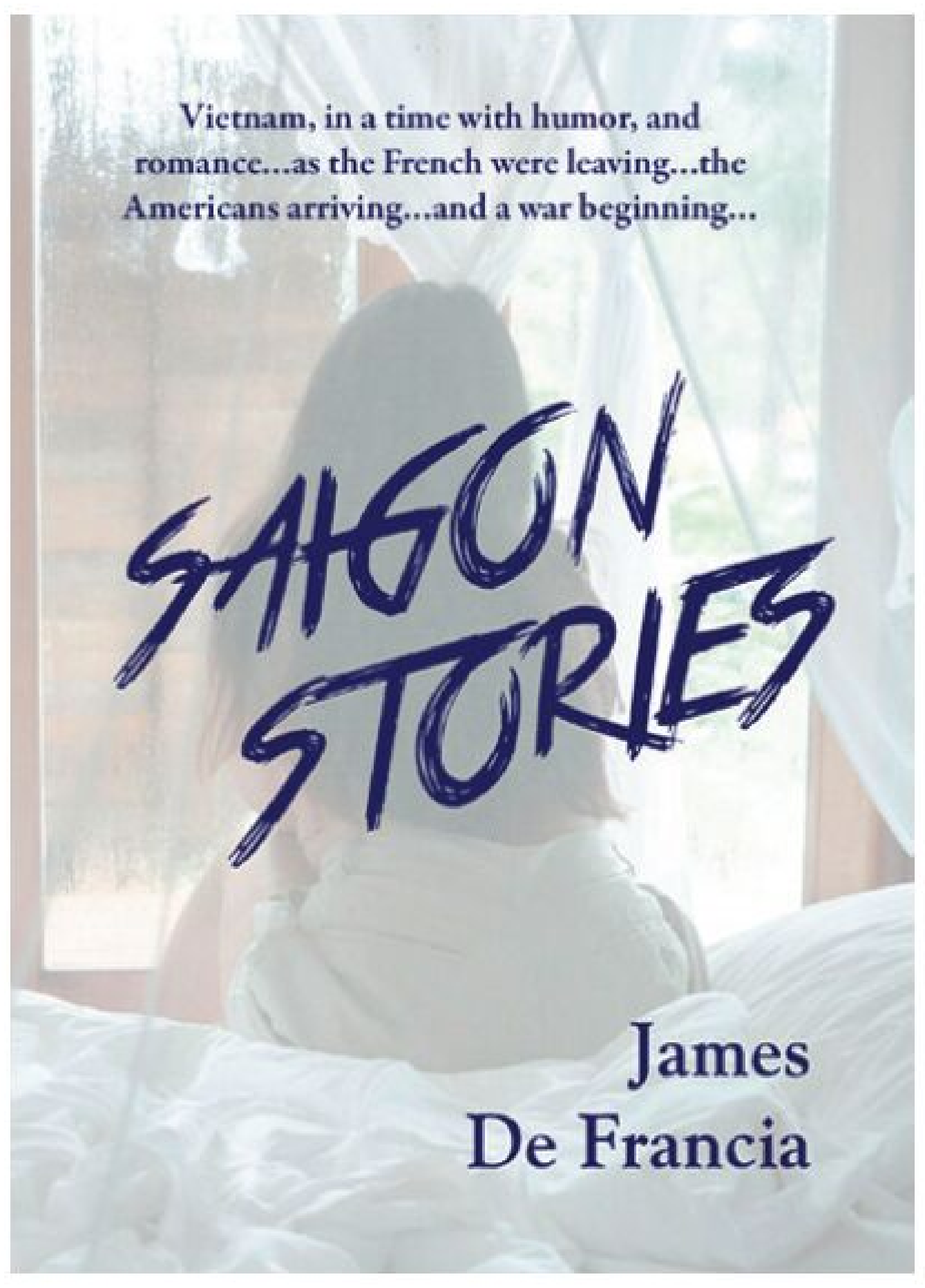
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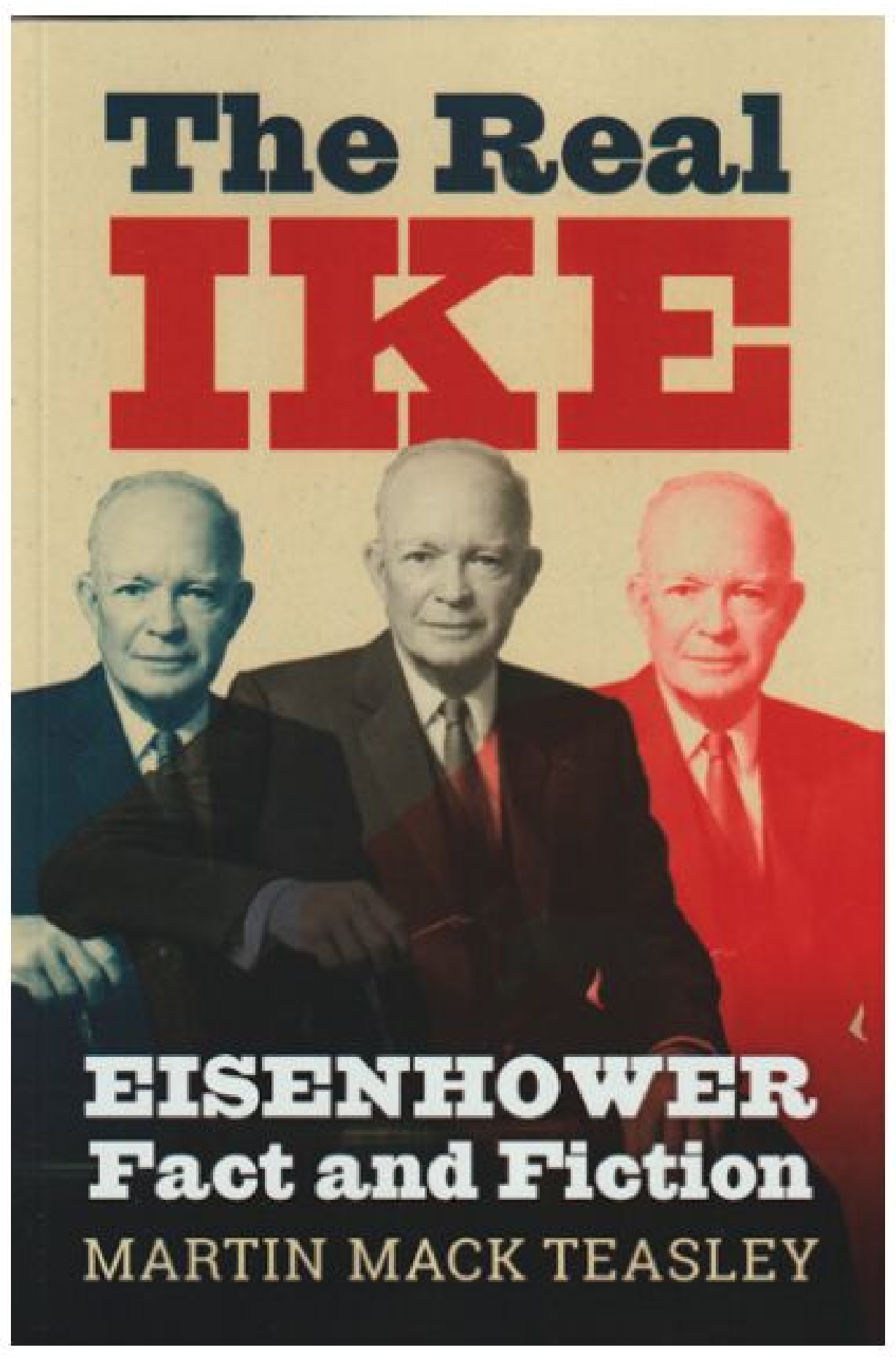
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recipient Richard Etchberger, said in May 2018 remarks to airmen at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Alaska on his father's commitment to service. "We didn't talk about it. We knew better. Nothing was ever said. No memorabilia or photos were displayed, except for a sole photo that Mom kept on her bedside table.

"The story I was eventually told was that he was killed in a helicopter crash somewhere in Southeast Asia, and I believed that story for another 18 years," Etchberger added.

In June 1996 testimony before the House subcommittee on military personnel, Ann Holland, the wife of Tech Sgt. Melvin Holland, relayed how she was informed that her husband was missing in action.

"I received a telephone call one afternoon in the middle of a cub scout meeting and was told that the mountain had been overrun and my husband was missing in action," Holland said.

"A few men had been rescued but a number of others had not been recovered," Holland added. "I was told I could tell no one, not my husband's sisters, my children, no one. If I said anything and it got out to the press I could be causing my husband's death."

In the September 2010 White House ceremony for the posthumous Medal of Honor award to Chief Master Sgt. Richard Etchberger, President Barack Obama noted that the secrecy surrounding the 1968 battle on the mountaintop in Laos had long delayed the presentation of the nation's highest award for valor.

Heather Variava, U.S. Ambassador to the Lao People's Democratic Republic, visits a recovery team in Laos, March 2025.

CPL. STEPHEN HOLLAND/MARINE CORPS

Obama told Etchberger's three sons that "today your nation finally acknowledges and fully honors your father's bravery."

"Because even though it has been 42 years, it's never too late to do the right thing," Obama said. "And it's never too late to pay tribute to our Vietnam veterans, and their families."

The site where Etchberger and the other Airmen fought to defend the radar outpost in 1968 is now a tourist attraction with metal stairway leading to the summit. In February of this year, Rick Holland, the son of missing Melvin Holland, climbed the 1,100 steps of the stairway to reach the summit of Phou Pha Thi on a visit that coincided with a DPAA recovery operation.

Once atop the mountain, Holland draped himself in the POW/MIA flag and shouted to the horizon: "I'm here Dad," according to a DPAA release.

He later told DPAA team members that "I've gone most of my life questioning — is my Dad proud of me? I hope so. I live my life to make him proud, and to honor him and the other men. I'm here, Dad, I came here for you." ■

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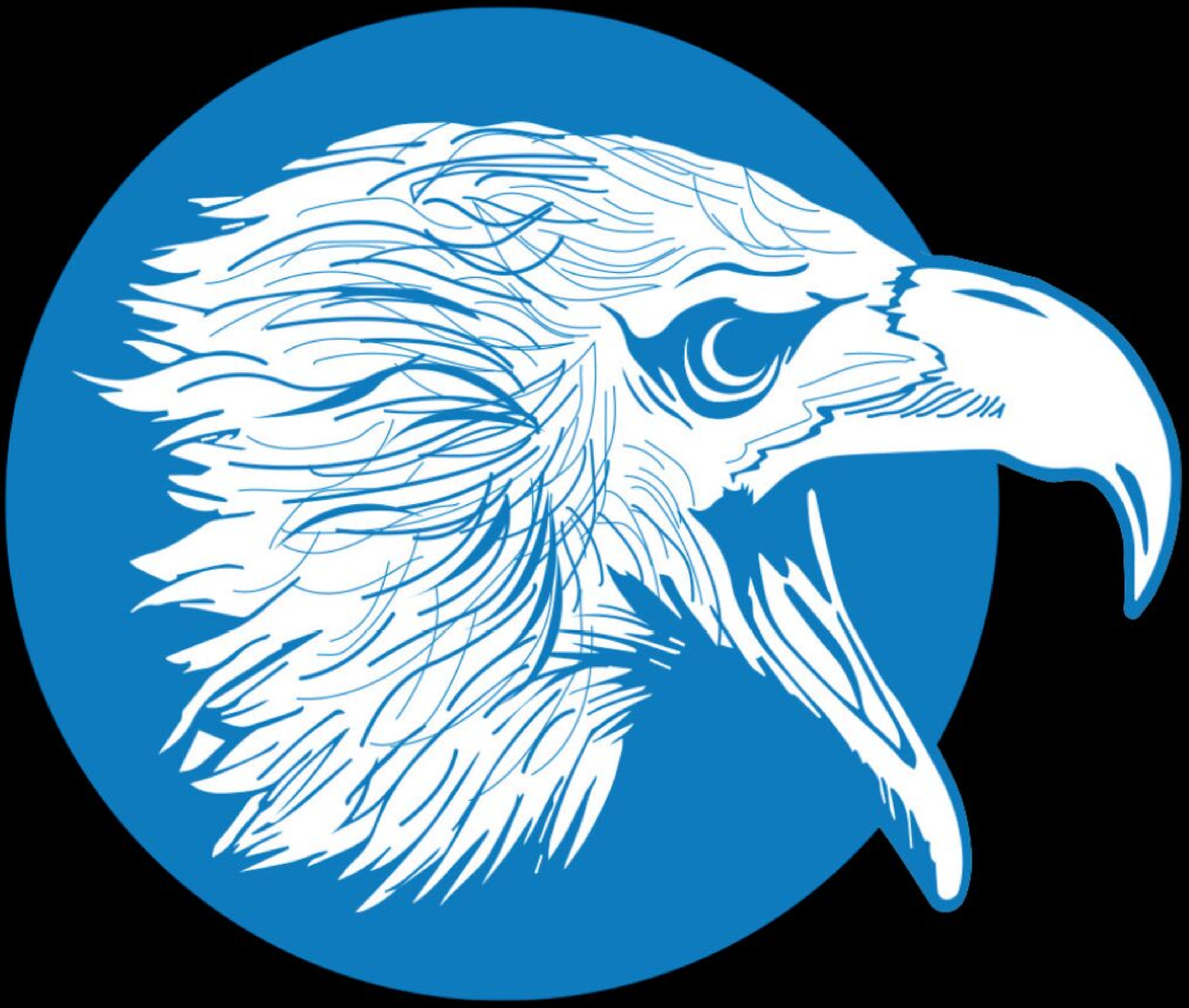

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RESEARCH ON VETERANS IS BROKEN. THIS TOOL AIMS TO FIX IT.

BY HOPE HODGE SECK

As the population of U.S. veterans becomes more diverse and vets' needs, from employment to medical treatment, continue to evolve, the demographic remains among the most difficult to survey.

A subset of the general population, veterans are most easily reached en masse through Department of Veterans Affairs rolls. But that leaves approximately half of all veterans out, according to the Pentagon-linked Rand Corporation think tank.

Alongside research organization NORC at the University of Chicago, Rand rolled out the Veterans Insight Panel, a survey cohort intended to allow for high-fidelity and rapid survey research on a veteran population representative of all ages, geographic areas and demographics.

The initial population, built by collecting data from Rand's American Life survey panel and NORC's AmeriSpeak cohort, has about 3,000 members, said Robert Bozick, a RAND senior demographer and director of RAND Survey Panels. He expects that to grow as organizations recruit.

"It is a moving target," he said. "We wanted to make sure that we could at least field a survey and get about 1,000 responses before we launched, because that's typically the size of surveys that our researchers and external researchers need."

The effort to launch a new survey panel followed a "need for more sophisticated, more nuanced data on veterans than what is typically being collected," Bozick said.

National organizations collecting data on Americans, from the U.S. Census to the Centers for Disease Control, typically include a question asking survey respondents to identify status, he said, but data collected on veterans using these methods is limited.

"You can compare veterans who have asthma to the general population, but you can't dig down deeper and beyond that, because the purpose is not to survey veterans; it's to survey the general population," Bozick said. "The next logical question [would be], 'Were you in a combat zone where there may have been a burn pit?' ... You can't get those from national sources."

An upcoming project for 2026 that's sponsored by the Pittsburgh-based Heinz Endowments, for example, will focus on veteran underemployment and employment trajectories, Bozick said.

While veteran employment data is included in monthly U.S. Department of Labor reports, veteran underemployment — meaning employment that doesn't fully utilize and recognize a veteran's skills and experience — has been much harder to quantify.

In the last two years, the National Veterans' Training Institute has reported that one-third of veteran job seekers are underemployed; the Journal of Veterans Studies has found 10% of post-9/11 veterans report underemployment; and the Raymond A. Mason School of Business has cited veteran underemployment as high as 60%.

"This is something our researchers are struggling with. When they ... collect data, they get small samples," Bozick said. "You either get a pool with a lot of Vietnam vets, not a lot of younger veterans or vice versa."

Notably, the Veterans Insight Panel is not exclusively for academic research. Groups and organizations will be able to pay to survey the cohort on topics of interest at a rate on the order of $2,000 per question.

A veteran and member of the Klamath Tribe attends an event hosted by the 173rd Fighter Wing in Klamath Falls, Oregon.

MASTER SGT. JEFFERSON THOMPSON/U.S. AIR NATIONAL GUARD

"We're really trying to keep it in that sort of community framework, as opposed to an academic data set where PhD scientists are analyzing data and publishing in journals," he said. "Not that we frown upon that, but that's secondary to what we're trying to do."

Also planned for early 2026, he said, is an omnibus survey containing questions from sources on issues relevant to veterans. ■

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L	O	N	E	L	Y	A	R	E	T	H	E	B	R	A	V	E	■	D	A	S
E	K	E	D	■	E	W	E	S	■	■	M	O	O	■	E	M	P	I	R	E
R	E	D	■	R	N	A	■	■	S	A	I	G	O	N	■	E	R	N	S	T
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E	L	M	E	R	■	S	E	A	L	■	E	A	R	E	D	■	E	T	A	T
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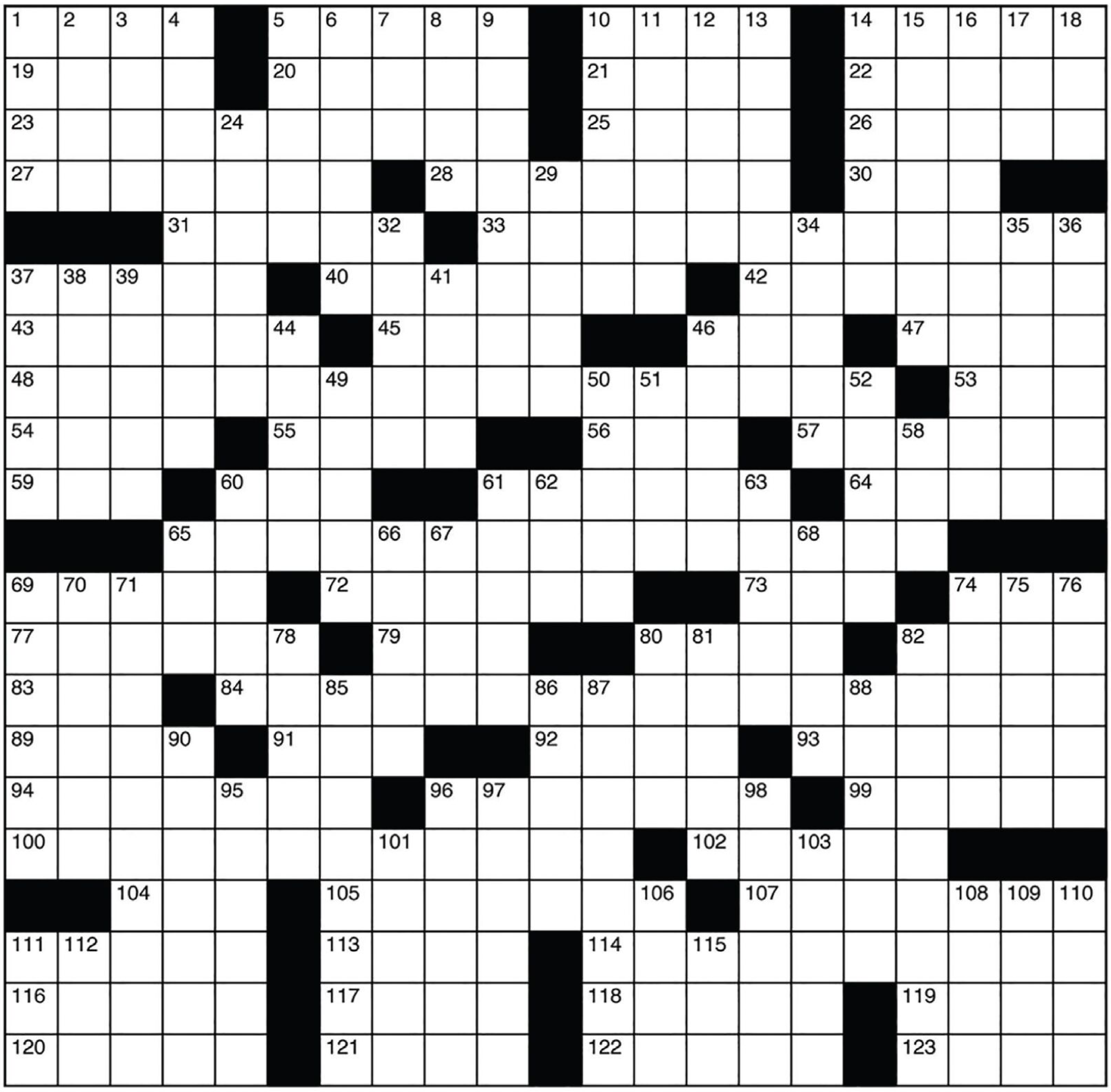
Crossword



TITLE-TRACK TRACKING

ACROSS
1 – rush
5 Rush
10 Corp. money overseers
14 Whacks
19 Skin soother
20 Longtime Yankees manager Joe
21 Plentiful
22 Painter Rousseau
23 Mil. officer in “Beetle Bailey”
25 Tennis’ Lendl
26 Potato sieve of a sort
27 Attach with glue
28 Captive’s cry
30 Cry of disgust
31 Indian money
33 Old theatrical illusion making objects seem to materialize
37 Script studier
40 What “top” is to “bottom”
42 “I’m not lying!”
43 “Hah, I win!”
45 Legal wrong
46 Old sporty Pontiac
47 Former rival of Atari
48 1962 Western with Kirk Douglas, Gena Rowlands and Walter Matthau
53 Govt. lawyers
54 Scraped (out)
55 Female bleaters
56 Bovine call
57 Kingdom
59 Scarlet, e.g.
60 Viral gene material
61 Ho Chi Minh City, formerly
64 Iowa senator Joni
65 Certain inner lettuce leaves
69 Hazard
72 Explodes
73 Pea protector
74 Trinity part
77 Newborn’s bodysuit
79 Texter’s “I think ...”
80 Rounded hammer end
82 Bruins’ sch.
83 Lupino of film
84 Instructors at golf resorts, often
89 Mardi Gras city, in brief
91 Suffix with Peking
92 Clears, as profit
93 Vigorless condition
94 Chicago newspaper
96 Evening wingdings
99 Force out
100 Leader of a marching musical group
102 The second “S” of SST
104 Boston fish
105 Title for Walter Scott
107 Be an arbiter
111 Rain forest, desert or wetland
113 2004 Chevy debut
114 Group associated with six key starting words in this puzzle
116 Fudd who bugs Bugs
117 Caulk, e.g.
118 Lop- – rabbit
119 Coup d’–
120 Valleys
121 J.D. Salinger title girl
122 Logbook, e.g.
123 Cartoon “Explorer”

DOWN
1 Haunted house sound
2 Gymnast Korbut
3 A ton
4 Totally ruined
5 Crouch down
6 Pupil coverer
7 Mork’s planet
8 Pitcher Hershiser
9 Relocate instantly, in sci-fi
10 Having small ridges, as a piecrust
11 “1700 hours”
12 Old enough to vote, say
13 Madrid miss
14 Says “So what?” with the shoulders
15 Bodybuilders lift them
16 Firmly supported by
17 Uno + due
18 Title for Walter Scott
24 Of the brain and spinal cord
29 “0.1” portion
32 – nous
34 Kitchen range
35 Sweeteners
36 Cup-and-saucer group
37 More skillful
38 “You Send Me” singer Sam
39 Quieted (down)
41 “Piggies”
44 “Laughing” mammal
46 “I do” sayer
49 In the know
50 Islamic chiefs
51 Acronym for a twofer sale
52 Edit
58 Lead-in to nuptial
60 Saintly article
61 Abnormally deep sleep
62 Rear, at sea
63 Neck backs
65 That boy’s
66 Clan
67 Drainage pit
68 Ancient Greek region
69 Destination of a trip, generically
70 “Bewitched” witch
71 Wages measured in terms of actual purchasing power
74 Scallywag
75 North fired by Reagan
76 Schnozz-related
78 Kate Nelligan title role
80 Tennis’ Sampras
81 Twisty letters
82 Lacking enthusiasm
85 Software clientele
86 Shallot cousin
87 Hunted for and found, with “out”
88 Central New York lake
90 Body’s midsection
95 Cow’s milk sources
96 Haunted house sound
97 “The Lion in Winter” co-star
98 Very serious
101 Roof edges
103 Indigent
106 Bangkok native
108 Choir voice
109 Put a rip in
110 This, in Baja
111 Beseech
112 Feeling sick
115 Epoch

CROSSWORD SOLUTION *page 58*

The Global War on Terrorism Memorial at the National Infantry Museum in Columbus, Georgia.

NATIONAL INFANTRY MUSEUM AND SOLDIER CENTER

OPINION

THE GWOT MEMORIAL MUST BE PURPOSE-BUILT TO EVOLVE

BY JIM CRAIG

In early October, the end of the war on terror — the war I fought in — drew one step closer when the Senate approved an amendment withdrawing the 2002 authorization for the use of military force that approved American military action in Iraq.

The United States recently entered the final stages of planning a memorial to it, to be placed next to the Lincoln and Vietnam Veterans Memorials. While laudable, if the Global War on Terrorism, or GWOT, Memorial is to have lasting meaning, it cannot be built as a static shrine.

The war on terror is unlike any conflict our country has attempted to memorialize nationally. It has a clear beginning, but its end is debatable. There is no universally shared narrative of victory or defeat.

For most Americans, the war on terror is less a war and more an era. Its reach extends from the battlefields of Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria to the policies that transformed airports, policing, surveillance and daily life. It reshaped how Americans understand security, service and citizenship.

The Global War on Terrorism Memorial Foundation selected the world-renowned architect Kengo Kuma to design the memorial. This is a good start; Kuma's work is known for its refusal of monumentalism.

But any plan that fixes the war on terror narrative too soon or too narrowly risks reducing its complexity to a platitude. The last thing our nation, or our veterans, need is another "thanks for your service" rendered in marble and steel.

That ritualized and hollow phrase mirrors a national habit of expressing support without engagement. Likewise, a static memorial would gesture at gratitude while avoiding the harder work of understanding what this era truly meant.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial offers both inspiration and warning. When Maya Lin's sunken, black granite wall was unveiled in 1982, critics condemned it as a "black gash of shame."

Today, it is among the most visited and revered sites in the country. Its power lies in simplicity and its uncanny ability to draw visitors into community and reflection.

That same power is its limitation. The wall speaks of honor and loss. It does not easily accommodate evolving narratives, such as women who served, Vietnamese who suffered or emigrated or the political divisions the war deepened.

It overshadows later additions, including the "Three Soldiers" statue, the Women's Memorial and the "In Memory" plaque. The wall endures, but it does not evolve.

The GWOT Memorial must do better. It must be purpose-built to evolve.

My research suggests a path forward using the "Four Truth Framework" developed by South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

This idea offers a way to hold multiple truths simultaneously: the forensic truth of facts and timelines, the personal truth of lived experience, the social truth of shared understandings and the healing truth that emerges from collective challenge and reflection. A memorial that plans for these layers can evolve as new narratives surface.

This approach can support a process by which people engage with complicated histories together rather than accept pre-set meanings apart. A static monument declares; an adaptive one invites. An adaptive monument creates space for participation, interpretation and even disagreement.

That is how a site becomes not merely a space but a place, a living arena of civic meaning with the goal of understanding, rather than resolution. The variety of programs hosted by the 9/11 Memorial and Museum exemplifies this approach.

Designing for adaptability requires intention. The GWOT Memorial should include physical, digital, virtual and programmatic elements that can change with time.

These could include rotating exhibits, open panels for new inscriptions and interactive installations that welcome stories from veterans, civilians, families, and others. Institutionalizing shorter than traditional periodic reviews would ensure that new scholarship, oral histories and community perspectives are incorporated. In this way, the memorial becomes a process, not an endpoint.

Critics will argue that a flexible memorial risks diluting the gravity of commemoration. But the opposite is true. A rigid monument freezes a single narrative in time, eventually excluding the very people it seeks to honor.

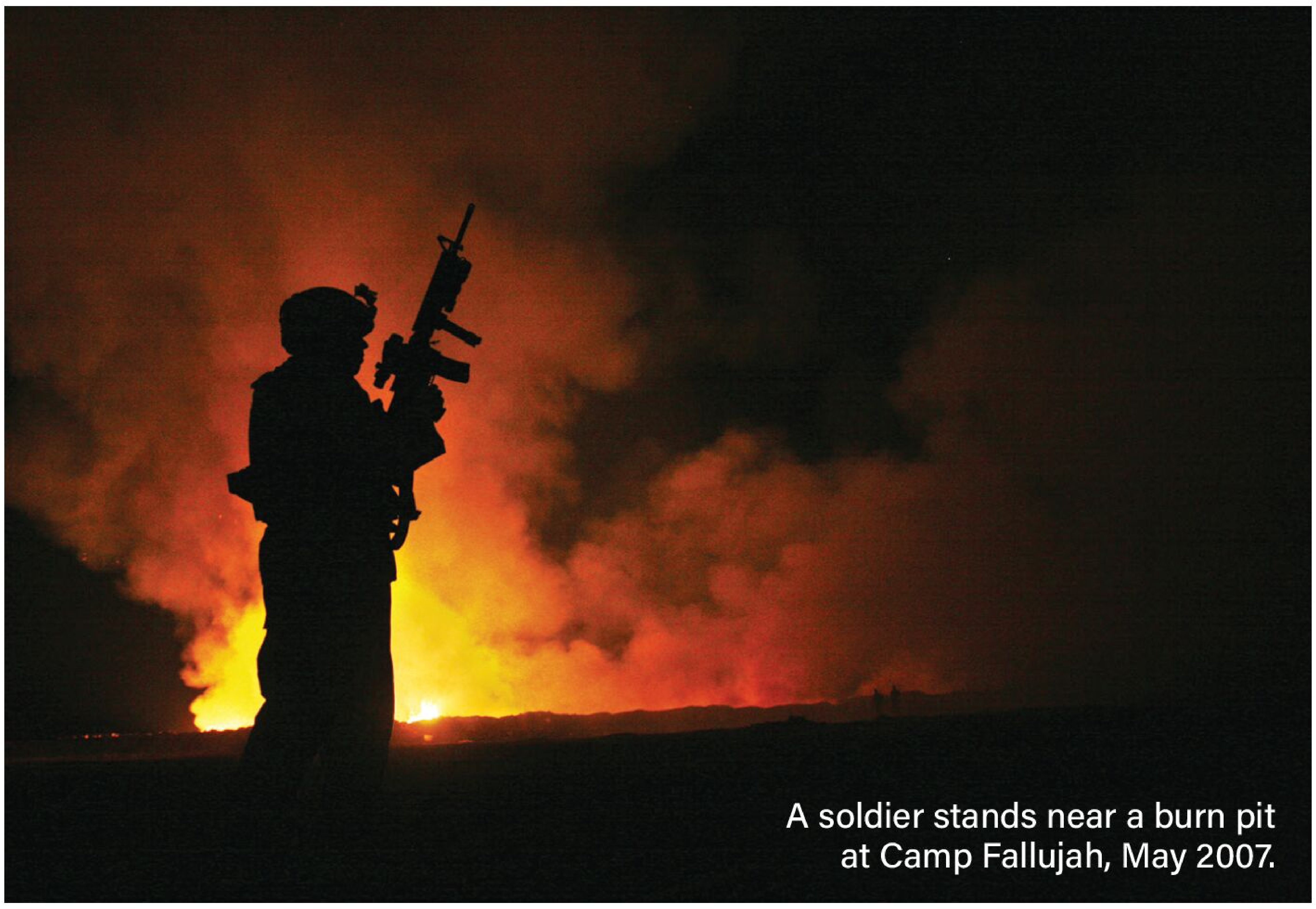
An adaptive memorial affirms that truth itself is layered and ongoing. It acknowledges that wars outlast their combatants, shaping generations and changing societies.

The war on terror may be over legislatively, but it remains active in memory and consequence. Its soldiers' children are now adults who grew up in its shadow.

Some have deployed to the same battlefields where their parents once fought. The memorial that bears this war's name must reflect that continuity. It should remind us that history is not a finished script but a conversation we inherit, understand, and shape.

Done well, the GWOT Memorial will stand for centuries; its designers have one chance to ensure it represents not just what we believe, but what we continue to learn. If it is built merely to sanctify, it will fade into the landscape of well-meaning forgetfulness. But if it is built to engage, question, listen and adapt, it can serve as a new model for how a democracy remembers. ■

Jim Craig is a professor of sociology and veterans studies at the University of Missouri-St. Louis and a veteran of the war on terror. He is a member of the Scholars Strategy Network.



A soldier stands near a burn pit at Camp Fallujah, May 2007.

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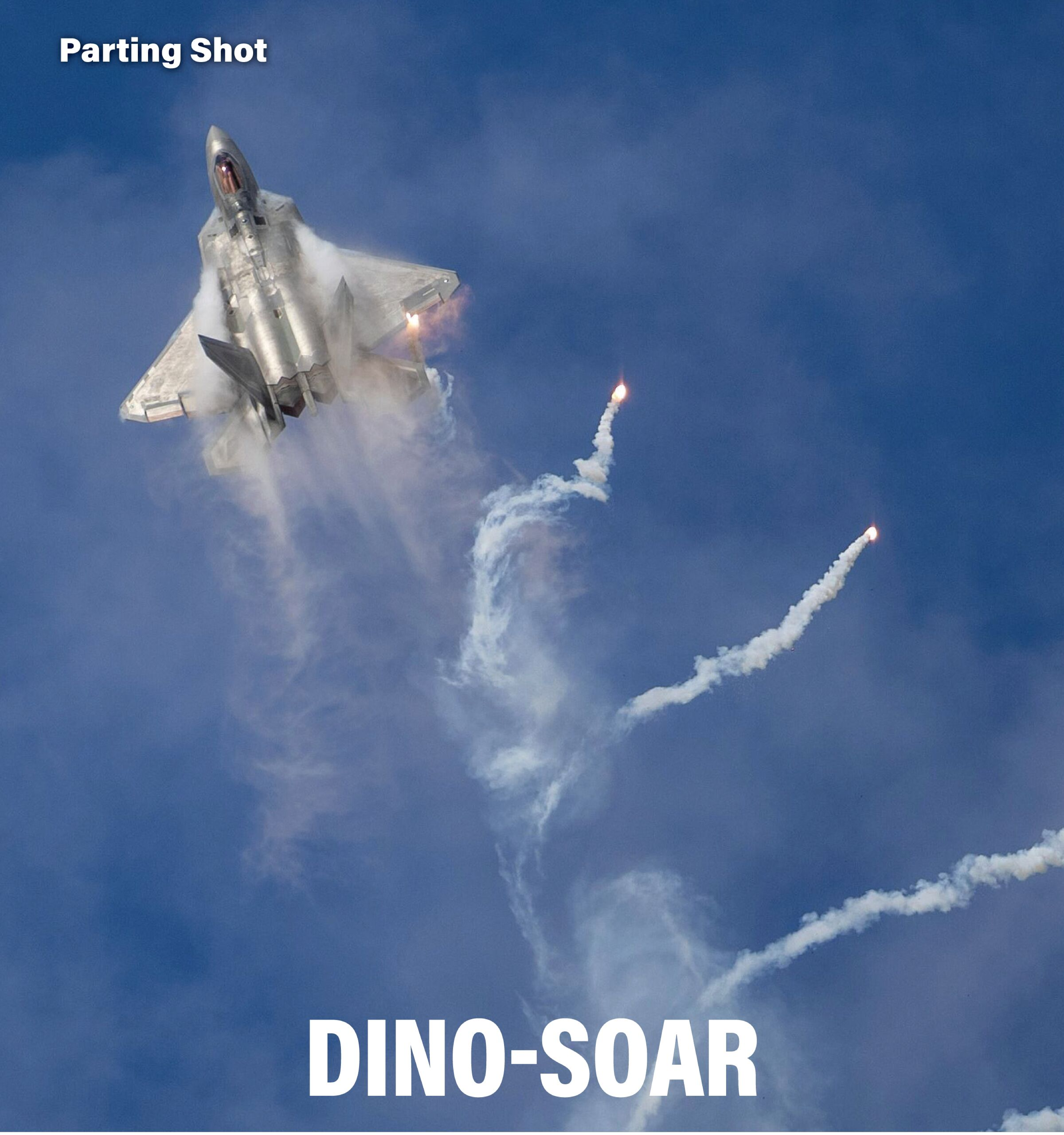

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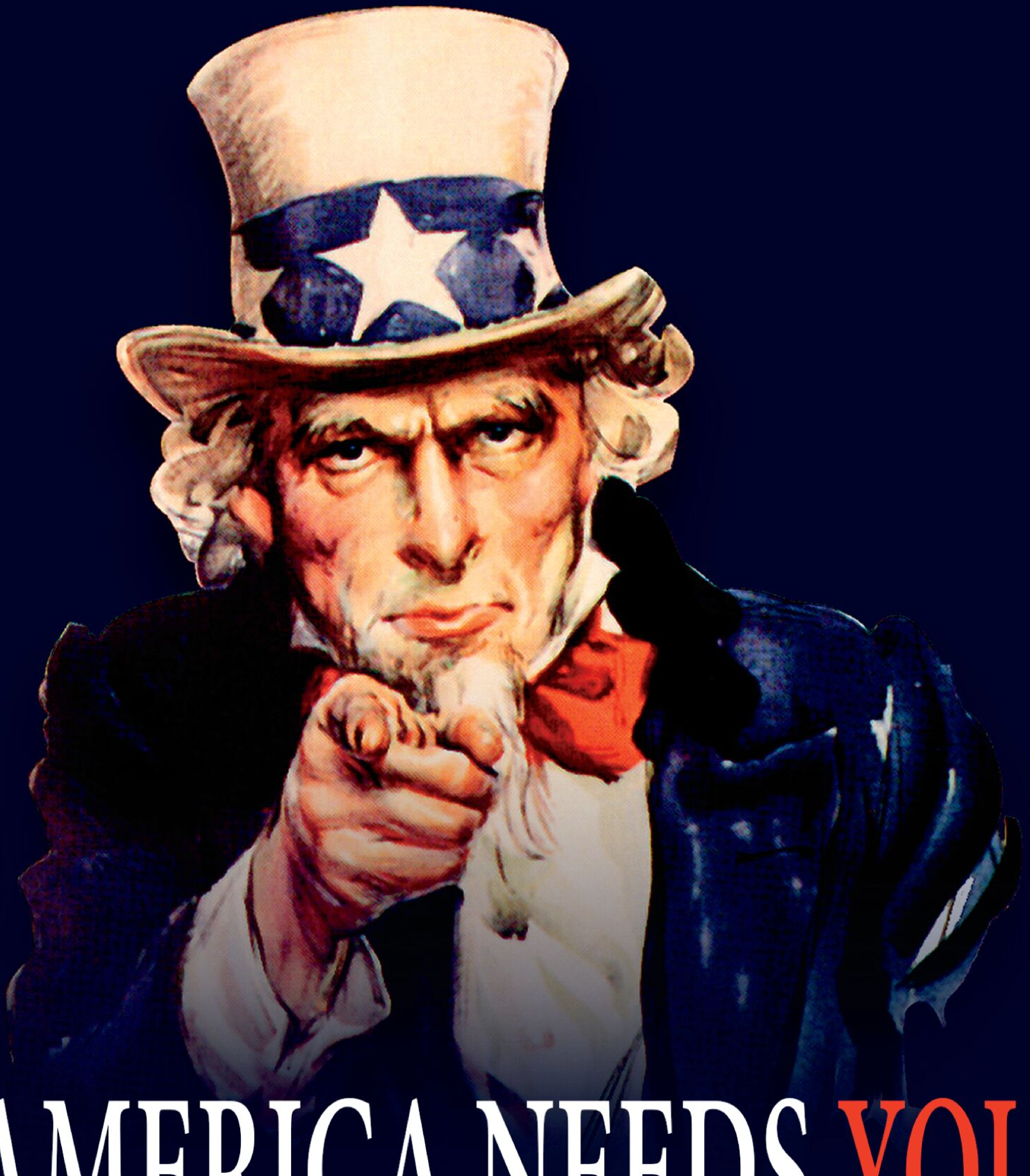

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